NF

ISSUE #53: HIGHEST HIGHS & LOWEST LOWS

MONSTER HUNTER STORIES 2: WINGS OF RUIN

METROID DREAD

FAMICOM
DETE
THE M
TH
STA

MI

THE G
ATTO
CHRO

NEO: THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU

NEW POKÉMON SNAP

MARIO + RABBIDS SPARKS OF HOPE

BOOK CLUB: ASK IWATA

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD 2

JULY/ AUGUST 2021

FILLING FURTHER GAPS

NO SURPRISES HERE! We're *so* very close to completing the back catalog restoration project, and we're adding three more vintage NF issues back into the mix of print availability once again as this latest edition is heading out our door and on its way to your mailbox.

First up for this batch, revisit NF's original Kirby cover art, custom-crafted out of clay by Camille Young! In a world where more and more Wii and Wii U games continue to show up on Switch, Kirby and the Rainbow Curse seems like one that may just stay locked in the previous generation. Reappreciate its visual flair with NF Issue #13: Art & Soul!

Next, since Nintendo has still not decided to pull back the curtain on the next iteration of the Switch, how about bouncing back in time to the beginning of the whole Switch era? (We need to keep appreciating the current hardware.) Issue #26: The Nintendo Switch Launch Guide can once again be yours in print form.

Lastly, we can't let the announcement of the all-new Mario + Rabbids Sparks of Hope pass by without once more making our original Mario + Rabbids issue purchasable in print. Its theme was "The Element of Surprise!", which was ironic, since the existence of Mario + Rabbids Kingdom Battle was leaked before its official reveal. And now history has repeated itself, since the existence of Sparks of Hope was also spoiled online shortly before its planned unveiling! Oh well. It's a winning crossover even if its games' reveals never happen the way they're supposed to! **— LUCAS**

NFMagazine.com/Shop

ISSUE #13: ART & SOUL

ISSUE #26: THE NINTENDO SWITCH LAUNCH GUIDE

ISSUE #28: THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE!

Next time . . . no back issues in this space. We've got something different cooking instead!

ISSUE #53: HIGHEST HIGHS & LOWEST LOWS

CONTENTS

INBOX 4

NEWS 8

DOWNLOAD 15

COMICS 7, 14, 53, 56, 66, 81

FEATURES 26

PREVIEWS 34

BOOK CLUB 54

RETRO 57

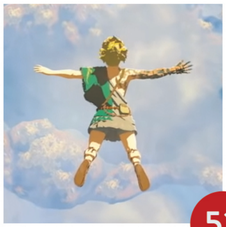
INTERVIEW 63

REVIEWS 67

COMMUNITY 78

NEXT ISSUE 82

JULY/ AUGUST 2021


52

34

60

46

HIGHEST HIGHS

LOWEST LOWS

26

40

38

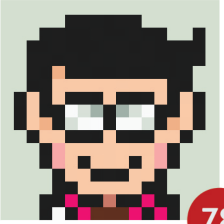
18

74

44

24

48


78

68

ON THE COVER

Winging his way into the most prominent position possible in our publication, it's Link's Crimson Loftwing! Bet you've never seen a bird bill as big as this boy's bulging beak! Given plenty of great pieces of artwork to choose from to craft a cover art representing The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword HD, we went with Link riding his Loftwing printed as large as possible in order to best capture the smiles on both boy and bird. They seem to be having fun in flight! But will those smiles stay for the rest of the quest? Read on!

INBOX

SOAR ONCE MORE

Falling from the sky to crash into your mailbox, email inbox or both, it's the latest issue of Nintendo Force! Will it land with grace, or smack into the ground with a thud? That probably depends on your personal opinion of The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword!

Yes, this July/August 2021 edition of NF is headlined by the Zelda game that first launched in November 2011, because once again Nintendo has reached back into Link's past to produce an HD port of an aging adventure. Unlike The Wind Waker HD and Twilight Princess HD, though, the general reception to the existence of Skyward Sword HD has seemed a little iffy.

It's a polarizing game! It earned plenty of perfect review scores and Game of the Year awards back when it was first launched, but the years that followed haven't been as kind, with public perception largely seeming to swing toward the negative. The whole murky situation seems like the perfect discussion to wade right out into the middle of, so that's what we're doing here!

This is "Highest Highs & Lowest Lows," an NF issue that neither praises Skyward Sword to high heaven nor ignores its best aspects to try to knock it down a peg. The truth is that it's a game that isn't a total joke or a spectacular masterpiece, but rather a journey that is marked by moments both brilliant and broken. It's got great high points and woeful low points, and examining each extreme I think sets the stage well for its encore on the Switch.

Beyond our Skyward Sword-related content, we've of course got a robust Previews section filled with first looks at new games just revealed at E3 (Metroid Dread has been resurrected, can you believe it?!), as well as reviews of the latest hits (and misses) and . . . a book club? Yes, we're pilot-testing a new, potentially recurring discussion section in which a group of NF staff members all read and then talk about new books related to the world of Nintendo. First up: Ask Iwata!

Thank you once again for choosing to fly the NF skies. This has been your captain speaking, wishing you a fun time reading this issue!

LUCAS M. THOMAS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ISSUE #52:
MAY/JUNE 2021

Everyone seems to have loved the custom cover created by photo pro Brandon Hill for our New Pokémon Snap issue! (The Pikachu and Squirtle toys, original Snap N64 cartridge and grey controller all came straight from the Thomas home, so it was extra fun to see them used in his composition!) We aren't able to do covers like this all the time, but since the reception was so positive we'll definitely aim to make them happen more often!

Player's Poll response time! We asked you all to share your experience of playing Skyward Sword in the past: your high point and your low. We then inquired about your opinion on games using motion controls, and finally once more put you in a pitching position to come up with your most creative idea for a Skyward spin-off or side mode. An array of answers awaits your eyes as always:

LETTERS

I played Skyward Sword on my Wii Mini back around 2016. My high point was duking it out with Ghirahim in a cut-throat 1 v. 1 where he mirrored my attacks – it reminded me of the Shadow Link battle from Ocarina's Water Temple, but more intense. My low point was trying to hop out of the water over a barrier using motion controls in a race section in Lake Floria. That was a miserable 15 to 30 minutes that I won't mind re-experiencing with standard controls.

Skyward Sword handled OK with Wii MotionPlus. Some things like the swordplay handled motion controls intuitively and in an engaging, thoughtful manner. Other elements like piloting the bird left a more conventional approach to be desired. Overall, Skyward Sword wasn't the heinous motion control offender some may have made it out to be, but it also didn't perfect the control scheme in the same ways that rail shooters and light gun games did on the Wii.

A Skyward Sword extra game mode? This one is easy! Skyward Sword: The Groose Chase. Groose easily rivals other silly icons from the series like Tingle and Kamaro for "Best Comic Relief." Could you imagine what it would be like to lead Groose and his pack of goons throughout the main narrative arcs of Skyward Sword? Maybe not, but I hope someone at Nintendo can (and did)!
– MAJORA T.

The high point of playing Skyward Sword for me was playing the game up until the second fight with The Imprisoned – and the low point was having to fight The Imprisoned the second and third time, because Link's stamina, ugh! **– QUINDY SAMMLER**

I've never actually played Skyward Sword, so I can't speak for the controls on the original hardware. However, motion controls, if they're implemented in a fun way, can be an absolute blast, like Cappy in Super Mario Odyssey or the "Way of the Hado" mode in Ultra Street Fighter II: The Final Challengers.
– LUCA RAMAZANI

Hey there to everyone at Nintendo Force! I personally never really got into the Zelda series until the HD remakes on Wii U, but I did borrow Skyward Sword from the library a few times around its release. I never really got far though, and while I have gone back and played most of the other Zelda games now, I still have yet to get back to Skyward Sword and am excited to have that opportunity with the Switch re-release!

Of course, I'm mainly hoping the handholding gets toned down. Maybe this could be included in a new "Master Mode" with other changes to increase the game's difficulty and shake up the dungeon layouts? Other than that, I'm not really sure what new content the game could use . . . maybe an expansion to exploration in the sky? I think it could be really interesting if they expanded some of the sidequests on Skyloft to include interactions with smaller settlements out on other islands in the sky.
– AIDEN M.

Skyward Sword had a "Hero Mode" on Wii, but they could go further, yes.

A GREAT BIG TEENY TINY IDEA

Imagining . . . Wow! Skyward Sword: Minish Island is amazing! Link discovers a sky island that is slowly sinking to earth, and upon landing on it is mysteriously shrunken to the size of a bug! He meets a race of tiny people who call themselves the Picori, and goes on a quest to purge a dark presence from the core of their island and restore its ability to fly. Link can collect Kinstones and magical Picori powers as he works to save their tiny nation. The star of this adventure would, of course, be the Picori people and their unique magic – and as a reward for saving their kingdom, they grace Link with a special Kinstone that allows him to shrink whenever the Picori people are near! This would tie into the main game as a way to include Easter eggs and hidden bonuses/items by including Minish Portals scattered around the main game areas, and the Picori spells that Link acquires there can even be used in the overworld after completing the questline! A love letter to a true gem from the Game Boy Advance back catalog! **– JASON KUENNEN**

An excellent concept! (And if the Picori don't make a surprise Skyward Sword appearance, they could very well pop up again in the new Breath of the Wild 2. The developers did consider having them in BOTW1!)

I was really excited to hear that a new Zelda game was coming out for the Nintendo Wii, being a big Zelda fan all my life. My friends knew this too, and I got the game as a birthday present that year. I was ecstatic and couldn't wait to try it. I even had the fun attachments for the Wiimote and Nunchuk that let you have a physical sword and shield! I ended up playing the game the next few days. It took me a while to finally get down to the ground level and tackle my first dungeon. I never ended up getting too much farther in the game, and never went back to finish it up, so it has sat unfinished. Same thing happened with Breath of the Wild. The last Zelda game I beat was the remake of Link's Awakening, which was amazing. I just seem to favor the more linear Zelda games than open world I guess.
– RUSS LYMAN
Time for a second swing at Skyward, then!

I'd give Skyward Sword a "Fury" mode that would probably be a Tingle revenge story – because 21 years of having a disrespectful Hylian pop your balloons really gets to a guy! Then, in "Tingle's Terror," you would play as a dutiful Oocca who, Master Sword in hand, would work to stop a rampaging midlife crisis Tingle! **– NOAH L. Z. WRIGHT**
Do Ooccas *have* hands?

I enjoyed the motion controls on the Wii. I thought it was fun, and made for a system that anyone – even those who aren't gamers – could play and enjoy.
– MICHAEL SCORZETTI

I have played Skyward Sword, and my high point was collecting the Gratitude Crystals. Solving others' problems just to get manifestations of their joy? Reminds me of Chibi-Robo!. The low point was trying to win a Heart Piece at the grossly misnamed Fun Fun Island. Never been so tempted to ragequit a Zelda game before. **– ALEX WINTER**
How about Un Fun Island?

I think it would be interesting to know what happens to Skyloft after the events of Skyward Sword. I don't really have any idea who the main character(s) of such a story would be, or how it would play, but a bit of extra epilogue content in the HD version would be awesome! **– DAVY LAWRENCE**

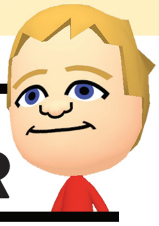
I played Skyward Sword back on the Wii when it first came out, and it remains one of my favorite Zelda stories. Gameplaywise, I have to give that distinction to Breath of the Wild or my all-time fave, Link to the Past – but when it comes to an honest-to-goodness narrative, Skyward Sword is hard to beat. I love all the characters (even the irritatingly helpful Fi), the way they and their world develop, and the epic setup the game gives to the whole Zelda timeline.

I thought the game handled motion controls better than just about any other on the Wii – they almost never felt gimmicky to me and were integrated fairly well into the traditional Zelda puzzle structure.

All that said, perhaps my favorite part of the game was the lovable lunk, Groose, who would also be perfect to star in his own Bowser's Fury-esque side story called Groose's Big Adventure or something equally schmaltzy. I'm not sure what he'd do, but I like to think he'd find his own helpful talking weapon . . . who would never be able to get a word in edgewise because Groose is a big know-it-all!
– BEDROTH

I feel like if you did get some sort of extra game mode, you'd get to go on Groose's adventure for the game. I always thought it was funny how he'd pop up and help here and there, and I always wondered what he was doing in between Link's adventures. I think you'd just be going through the levels Link already does, but as Groose, helping various people and preparing for the future battles to help Link!
– MATT SIMONE
Nintendo, the people have spoken. More Groose!

CARTER'S CORNER



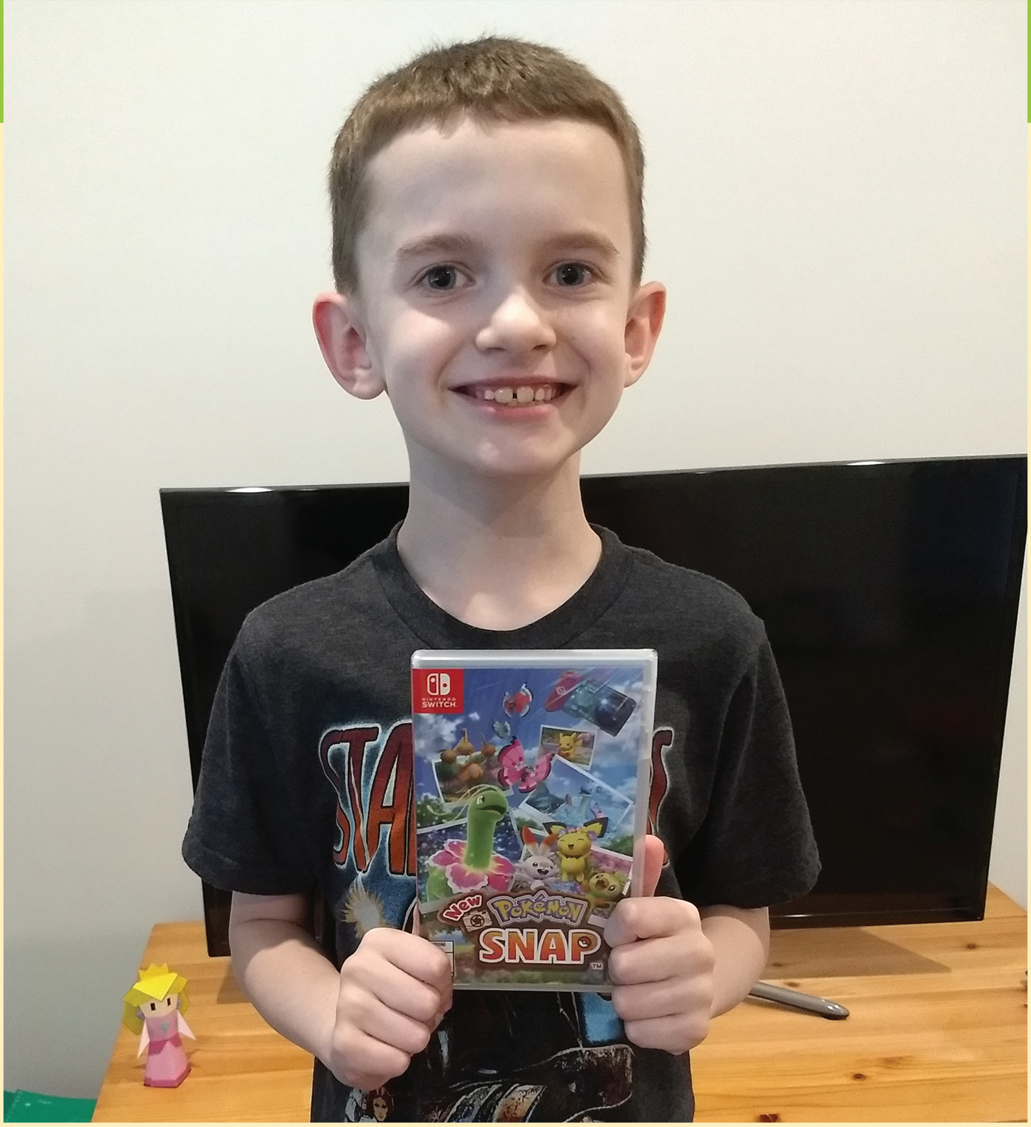
Carter Thomas here. Sorry I haven't done the Super Mario Odyssey speedrun yet! My Dad's been working to make a new place downstairs for us to do videos. I'll really do the speedrun when that's all done! I also have ideas for other speedruns too.

By the way, my favorite kingdom is Bowser's Kingdom and my least favorite is Wooded Kingdom. I wonder what else I'll write in the magazine! Because I wrote this on June 12 and June 14. I don't know what I'll write next. I hope I'll write about New Pokémon Snap or something about Link.

If you haven't watched the first Super Mario Odyssey speedrun videos, Cap through Luncheon is the first one and Ruined through Moon is in the second. The new one will be Cap through Moon!

Guessing game! What is my favorite boss in Link's Awakening? Find out next time!

(And speedrun. Hats off!)



SNAPSHOT OF A WINNER!

Make sure you always take the time to send in answers to each issue's Player's Poll, because you could end up being a winner too – just like Henry Francisco, seen here with his New Pokémon Snap prize!

THE PLAYER'S POLL

Congratulations to **Aiden M.**, the winner of our Skyward Sword Player's Poll! Your new chance to win is below, and this time around we're interested to read your responses to some questions about the Heroes in a Half Shell!

QUESTION #1

Leonardo. Michelangelo. Donatello. Raphael. Which one of the four Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is your personal favorite, and why?

QUESTION #2

Which of their many shows, movies or comics was your introduction to the world of the TMNT? Which has been the best?

QUESTION #3

Finally, share with us your memories of playing TMNT video games. (Bonus points for anyone who's actually beaten the original NES game!)

Email your responses to **PlayersPoll@NFMagazine.com** with the subject line "Player's Poll for Issue #54" – this time, *four readers* whose answers are picked for print will each win a copy of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge!

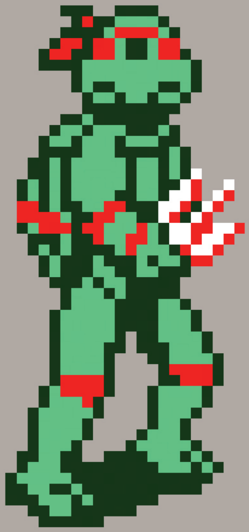
NINTENDO FORCE

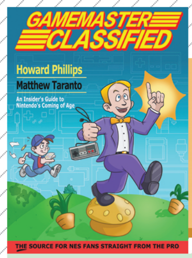
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Lucas M. Thomas @NintendoForce

STAFF WRITERS
Evan Campbell @evancampbell
Jonathan Holmes @NonTrotski
Kevin Knezevic @kevknez
Maggie Jones Lutey @AvengerMags
Brett Martin @NightramVGMM
David Oxford @LBD_Nytetrayn
Nadia Oxford @nadiaoxford
Tony Ponce @megaStryke
Kris Randazzo @GeekadeKris
Rebecca Rudranath @strawbecky_81

STAFF ARTISTS
John-Charles Holmes @Sonic9jct
Lindsey Layne King @LuminousLungKey
Matthew Loffhagen @kotorcomics
Matthew Taranto @MatthewPTaranto
Thor Thorvaldson @thormeister1971

CONTRIBUTORS
Carter Thomas





In the upcoming *Gamemaster Classified,* Nintendo's former spokesman Howard Phillips reveals all sorts of tales from working at the company! But sometimes truth is stranger than fiction; can you guess which of the following pairs of scenarios actually happened? Check your score at the bottom and learn the full stories when *Gamemaster Classified* releases next year!

1: B, 2: A, 3: B
For more info on the book, check out
https://gamemasterclassified.backerkit.com/hosted_preorders

BY MATTHEW TARANTO

NINTENDO "AT" E3 2021

Another Electronics Entertainment Expo has come and gone – kind of.

FOR THE PURPOSE of posterity, I'd like to preserve in print a record of E3 2021:

It was alright.

Two issues ago, I doomed and gloomed about the annual Electronics Entertainment Expo, saying that it was fading out of existence (and not being too sad about that fact). E3 has been a once-a-year summertime spectacle for the video game industry. An event where companies from across the spectrum – from major hardware publishers like Nintendo and Microsoft down to niche, small studios – gather together in the shared physical space of the L.A. Convention Center to show off their latest products and projects in progress. It's an institution.

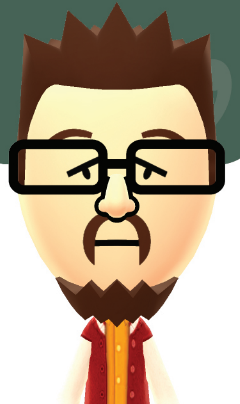
The Covid-19 pandemic, of course, caused E3 2020 to be cancelled. It just wasn't safe to bring E3's normally massive crowds of people together in the same building a year ago . . . or this year either. As the pandemic has not yet passed, an in-person event was ruled out for the second year in a row.

That sent the ESA scrambling. The organizers of the annual event pulled together a kind of virtual expo seemingly at the last minute – but did a botched job, presenting a website for "attendees" that did little more than dox them by broadcasting their personal information.

Still, Nintendo decided to show their support. Though the company is perfectly capable of presenting a standalone Direct to make their announcements, they presented their latest one as being "from" E3 2021, then followed it up with several hours of Treehouse Live broadcasts, as would normally happen in L.A. Other companies propped up the falling expo as well, with a mix of presentations both solid (Microsoft) and terrible (Capcom).

What does it mean for the future? I can only guess that they're all hoping E3 can stay on life support long enough to be fully revived as an in-person event once again. Next year?

> "I'm conflicted about E3. On the one hand, I did personally enjoy the times I went in person in the past, and I don't want anyone whose job it was to prepare the physical booth spaces to go unemployed. On the other, Nintendo can drop Directs online any time they want, so it doesn't make sense to stay shackled to the old summertime schedule. Perhaps E3 can be replaced as alternative in-person events are embraced? – **LUCAS**"



One and Done

Yuji Naka has stepped away from Square Enix.

WELL, I DIDN'T want the man to lose his job.

In our last edition, I presented my not-so-glowing review of Square Enix's new Balan Wonderworld. After showing early promise that inspired a few hopeful previews in earlier issues, the final product proved to be a massive letdown – and I was considerably more kind in my 5.0-rated assessment of the game than many other outlets were as they scourged its Metacritic average by assigning even lower scores.

Alas, it seems the failure of the game has caused its top-billed creator, Yuji Naka, to be shown the door at Square Enix.

Naka is a video game industry icon. He was the programming genius who gave the world the original Sonic the Hedgehog games. He helmed Sonic Team. He led development on classics like Nights into Dreams, Burning Rangers and Phantasy Star Online – and that was all just in his tenure at Sega!

After he left to form his own company, Prope, in 2006, Naka gifted the planet with more gaming greatness like Rodea the Sky Soldier (the Wii version was great, at least), and even contributed to Nintendo first-party releases like Wii Play: Motion and StreetPass Mii Plaza.

This long list of achievements enticed Square Enix to offer him a job in 2018, and there he solely worked on Balan Wonderworld for over three years. That game has been such a spectacular failure, it seems, that Naka will get no second chance there and is once again out on his own. He left Square Enix in April, and has said himself that he's now considering retirement. I hope he reconsiders! **– LUCAS**

Perry + Pikachu

Katy celebrates Pokémon with "Electric."

THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY of the Pokémon franchise is being marked this year by video game releases like New Pokémon Snap and the upcoming Sinnoh region remakes Brilliant Diamond and Shining Pearl – but The Pokémon Company isn't keeping the festivities locked down to video games alone. Pokémon has become a major multimedia property, after all! So it's only right to celebrate the series in cards and cartoons and . . . pop music?

I'll give you one guess at which one of those things I personally know the least about, but I'm at least in touch with the music industry enough to know that Katy Perry is a major name. So a collaboration between the queen of pop and the brightest star among all the Pocket Monsters is a pretty big deal!

Katy's new single "Electric" was released in May, and its accompanying music video features the singer hanging around a lighthouse with her pal, a Pikachu! Through the magic of music, perhaps, the two are then transported back in time and see their younger selves: Katy a teenager who's just starting out as a musician, and Pikachu still an unevolved Pichu! The older versions secretly help the younger ones join a talent show, and the whole small story is wholesome and fun.

"Electric" is just one track that will appear on "Pokémon 25: The Album," a joint effort by many famous artists that's due to go on sale in the Fall. Others that will contribute include Post Malone and J Balvin. No word yet if my favorite group, The Sugarhill Gang, has been asked to be involved. **– LUCAS**

COLLECTOR'S CO R

LEGO Luigi Joins his Bro

The Luigi Starter Course is shipping to stores this summer.

ON AUGUST 1, Mario's twin brother finally joins the LEGO Mushroom Kingdom with the "Adventures with Luigi Starter Course." Also tagging along are Boom Boom, a Bone Goomba and a pink Yoshi. The 280-piece playset builds a tower/fortress type world where Luigi must cross a dangerous spinning seesaw to defeat Boom Boom. Luigi is built just like LEGO Mario, in that he has an LCD display on his chest – and he'll have new reactions to all of the previous playsets! The set also comes with a Question Block, entrance pipe and goal post. It will retail for $59.99 – just make sure yours hasn't been opened before you buy it!

TWEWY Merch

In celebration of the animation! (And sequel.)

A BARRAGE OF new merchandise from The World Ends with You has hit the Square Enix store!

A Neku Sakuraba static figure is coming in September, along with a new Bring Arts posable figure releasing in January 2022. It comes with several faces, hand swaps and effects, and is different from the previous Bring Arts figure.

There is also a plethora of Mr. Mew items launching, including a big plush (pictured), a pouch, a cushion, slippers and various jewelry items. Also look for the "Special Merchandise Set" with the pins, plush and bag.

Lastly, a Shiki figure is set to launch this September too!

First 4's Latest

Hyrule's Champions and a brand-new Kirby!

FIRST 4 FIGURES has been busy with its many licenses, including two Nintendo-related ones: Zelda and Kirby!

Revali was announced first, and while he is the third in the Breath of the Wild line, he suggests the other three Champions are on their way. The exclusive from the F4F site nets you the light-up base, which is a trend for the line.

Kirby and the Goal Door was the next announcement. This PVC statue has blue and orange flowers that activate a twirl motion and music respectively. See Kirby spin!

Also on the way: Mumbo Jumbo, Crocodile Banjo, Aku Aku, Crash Bandicoot and Amaterasu and Oki from Okami!

BY BRETT MARTIN

Adopt a New Animal Buddy

A fresh set of plush friends are ready to move in with you!

BLATHERS, CELESTE, GULLIVER, PASCAL – and newcomers from New Horizons C.J. and Flick – will all arrive in plush form in July from San-ei. A re-release of the first set containing Bunnie, Isabelle, K.K. Slider, Fauna, Kicks and Timmy and Tommy Nook will also roll out at the same time. Many are hoping the newfound popularity and reach the series has enjoyed over the pandemic will echo in its merchandise sales! Each plush will retail around $20, and they're currently only available in Japan. But the first set was distributed by Little Buddy in North America, so it may behoove you to employ some patience and save some bucks!

This announcement came from a huge batch of Nintendo franchise plush news. Kirby is getting a set of five new plushes called "Kororon Friends" that features the Ice Dragon, not previously released in any Kirby set. And a very exciting re-release of old Pikmin plushes will include the Purple and White Pikmin and the incredibly rare and popular Louie! (Don't wait to buy him!)

Or Build One!

Build-a-Bear's got new options too.

WHEN A NEW brand comes to Build-a-Bear, the characters that feature in the collaboration tend to be its most popular or recognizable. While Tom Nook is recognizable, he isn't necessarily the most popular, as he places you in debt and you're under his thumb for a large portion of the game. Conversely, Isabelle is cute, quirky and loyal to you as your secretary and assistant. The two characters are basically yin and yang in the series, and they're the two characters the player is guaranteed to interact with – at least from New Leaf on.

Those two launched the Animal Crossing X Build-a-Bear crossover beginning in April, then K.K. Slider joined the line in June. Each plush comes with a sound device that plays phrases or theme music, but only if bought from Build-a-Bear.com for $51. That's the price for Tom and Isabelle, at least. K.K. is nine bucks cheaper since, as usual, he's not wearing any clothes! (He does come with a K.K. Disco song, though.)

Sleeper and "wristie" accessories can also be bought for these or regular bears. They're also available at the Nintendo online store and at Nintendo New York for a slightly lower price because of the missing sound. They should be released to Build-a-Bear stores soon.

amiibo UPDATE

WE WERE STARTING to get a little light on new amiibo news, but thanks to E3 we have some new stuff to talk about!

First, I hope you got your Banjo-Kazooie, Byleth and Terry. Next up should be Min-Min, Steve and Sephiroth, if they continue the trend of releasing them in trios. Pyra and Mythra will either be on one amiibo or sold as a two-pack, and now Kazuya has been added to the roster, but there were no announcements about any of them at E3. (We'll probably see a few pop up during Mr. Sakurai's Kazuya presentation on June 28.)

Also watch for the Monster Hunter Stories 2: Wings of Ruin amiibo sold only through GameStop. The exclusive trio includes Ena, Tsuniko and Razewing Ratha, and they're set to release alongside the game on July 9.

The most controversial amiibo to date is "Zelda and Loftwing," as it unlocks fast travel in the game. It marks the first time that a quality-of-life gameplay enhancement has been "locked" behind an amiibo, and it – while gorgeous – is priced at a whopping $25. The figure is a larger one, along the lines of the Guardian from Breath of the Wild. I would have been happy if it just netted you a few Rupees, but it certainly put a dark cloud over the announcement, as it's reignited the years-old debate about how much or how little amiibo figures should do when tapped into a game. Zelda and her big bird release July 16.

Finally, the newest figures to be revealed are a two-pack from Metroid Dread, arriving October 8. One figure features Samus in her sleek new armor, while the other depicts Dread's signature enemy, the E.M.M.I., standing in a very menacing pose. Tapping the Samus amiibo will grant an Energy Tank the first time, then a small energy refill once a day after that. The E.M.M.I. will give Samus a Missile Tank the first time, then a minor missile refill each day.

Alluring Waluigi

A daring new depiction of one dastardly dude.

IS THIS A News section article about nothing more than the existence of a single new piece of promotional art for Waluigi? Yes. Am I ashamed of writing it? Goodness no!

Just feast your eyes upon the glory of this man. Behold how enticingly he contorts his jagged, lanky frame. See the back-breaking angle he has somehow achieved between his rear end and his spine. Look fully at his turned-in toes and take them in, then finally, yes, allow your attention to drift to his tongue. That crooked, snake-like tongue.

Listen, some executive at Nintendo demanded that this image be made. And then some 3D artist on staff had to spend their time twisting, spinning and posing this character's newest, most detailed model to make it happen. The rose! Look at the intricacy of the rose! That had to be made from scratch just so this could exist.

Nintendo is so delightfully absurd, and this may be my favorite example of their utter, unashamed oddness in years. Maybe this pose could be his Smash render, so we'd get it as an amiibo! **— LUCAS**

Hop to the Gallery!

Nintendo's building an official museum.

ANY WESTERN NINTENDO fans considering a trip to visit the company's home country will soon have another stop to add to their itineraries. Right alongside seeing Super Nintendo World, the great retro gaming shops of Akihabara and the original headquarters from the 1930s (which has now been renovated to become a hotel), sightseers should set aside some time for a stroll through the new Nintendo Gallery.

Nintendo announced plans for the construction of the gallery in June. In the press release, they stated:

"Nintendo has been discussing the possibility of building a gallery, as a way to share Nintendo's product development history and philosophy with the public. To this end, the Nintendo Uji Ogura Plant will be renovated to accommodate the gallery, a decision reached after taking consideration of The City of Uji's plan of re-developing the nearby Ogura Station area."

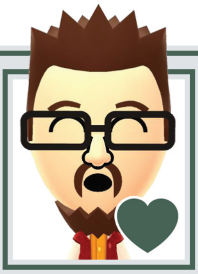
The Nintendo Uji Ogura Plant had been one of the company's manufacturing facilities up until 2016. But no video games were made there! Rather, the plant handled the creation of Nintendo's playing cards and Hanafuda cards, carrying on the tradition that began all the way back at the founding of the company in 1889. How fitting, then, that a facility already connected to the company's 130+ year history would be selected to be the site to celebrate that history!

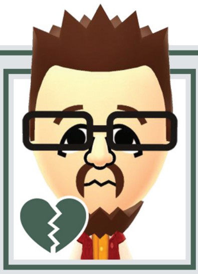
(Oh, and no worries about the card manufacturing. That's still happening – just in a different building.)

The press release ended with a declaration that the Nintendo Gallery (still just a tentative name at this point) is planned to be completed within the 2023 fiscal year, which ends in March 2024. A wait of nearly three more years seems like a long while, but compared back to the whole Nintendo timeline that now stretches for more than 13 decades, that will be like a drop in the bucket!

> One last bit from the press release: "exhibits and experiences" are promised. I'll cross my fingers that visitors will be able to experience some of the old electro-mechanical light gun games from the '70s that later inspired the NES Zapper. Like the original Duck Hunt! – **LUCAS**

Great!
The charisma of Waluigi truly knows no bounds.





Oh.
I hope Yuji Naka isn't done for good!

FORECAST

A meteorological look at the biggest game and DLC releases currently scheduled to debut in the next few months.

FIRST TO TAKE flight in the month of July will be Capcom's Monster Hunter Stories 2: Wings of Ruin, winging its way into stores on the 9th. It's clear that Capcom is really proud of this product, as they've been pushing it heavily for months now, promoting it with multiple video preview events and setting it up right alongside Rise as a game of equal importance. Take a fresh look yourself with our preview on Pages 40 & 41!

SET TO SOAR second is Skyward Sword, as its arrival will occur on July 16. Our cover game for this NF edition, The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword HD is a fascinating re-release, as it has to both live up to the heights of players' elevated expectations for the Zelda brand here in 2021 and overcome some lingering low opinions from 2011. Start on Page 26!

JULY ISN'T NORMALLY known for having many major game launches, but this year the summertime isn't letting us breathe for even a week! Quickly following after Monster Hunter and Zelda will be the innovative indie adventure Cris Tales on July 20. This tale of time travel takes place across the past, present and future simultaneously, and it's such an intriguing approach to an RPG that you've just got to take a look on Page 43!

STILL NOT LETTING up even in its final week, July will additionally bring us the long-awaited sequel to The World Ends with You on the 27th. The original game is one of those cult classics that far too few people experienced when it first came out over 13 years ago – don't be one of the unlucky ones who also ignores this follow-up! More on Page 44.

WHAT A RUMBLE it will be on July 27! Not only is NEO: The World Ends with You launching on that date, but so is Capcom's The Great Ace Attorney Chronicles. There's a major overlap between the fandoms of both of these series, so I'm sure lots of people are stressing about which game they're going to play first out of the two of them! Allow yourself to become conflicted as well by reading our preview on Pages 38 & 39.

AFTER THE UTTER assault on our wallets that is the month of July, August will thankfully present a bit of a breather. Worthwhile games will be making their debuts then, too, but probably the only huge release of the month is No More Heroes III, set for August 27. Our final pre-release preview is prepared for you on Page 42.

"It's summertime, and the living is easy. We've got a great variety of brand-new releases to enjoy inside over the months ahead, and fresh air and sunshine to take in outdoors. What's more, the future's looking bright beyond the summer months as well, with several new games just revealed at E3 giving us a pathway to follow all the way through the end of the year and into 2022. Things are looking up! – **LUCAS**"

IT'S THE FINAL COUNTDOWN!

Super Smash Bros. Ultimate's second batch of DLC combatants, Fighters Pass Vol. 2, is almost at an end. There's just one slot left to fill! Who will it be? Will the Pass go out on a high note, with some wildly unexpected guest star? Or will it fizzle out like Pass 1 did when it ended with the largely unwanted Byleth? Place your bets now!

The penultimate addition to the Pass 2 cast was revealed during Nintendo's E3 2021 Direct to be Kazuya Mishima from the Tekken series. Once again, Mr. Sakurai and his team managed to surprise us, as a Tekken rep wasn't high up on just about anyone's list of possibilities! The series is legendary in the fighting genre, though, so it certainly deserves Smash representation. We'll review Kazuya next time!

BY THOR THORVALDSON

Linking the Past with the Future

The first wave of Age of Calamity DLC has blazed onto the battlefield!

THE IMPORTANCE OF Age of Calamity is about to be amplified.

Our second look at The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild 2 (see Page 52) has given us a few hints that an old staple of the Zelda series might be coming back into play again: time travel. While far from confirmed, the action in that new sequel seems like it might play out across two different time periods. At the very least, we've clearly seen that Link will gain a new power that lets him rewind time: a step up from the Sheikah Slate's Stasis from the first game.

But if you really want to experience the full range of time-shifting shenanigans in this part of the Zelda timeline, you really should play Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity! It's a canon time travel tale chronicling the journey of a tiny egg-shaped Guardian who tries to go back to the past to warn Zelda about the coming apocalypse.

There's no better time to give the game a second look, either, since the first wave of DLC has just gone live. Expansion Pass Wave 1 is called "Pulse of the Ancients" and it adds to the already overflowing amount of content in the base game.

You'll get to play as the "Battle-Tested Guardian," mowing down mobs with its infamous eye laser. You'll get to spin, fling and grab with Link's new weapon, the Flail. And Zelda? Though she should probably put a helmet on for safety's sake, she still looks great astride her all-new weapon, the Master Cycle. First seen in Breath of the Wild's DLC! DLC is referencing DLC now. What a world!

Extra challenges and tougher foes round out Wave 1, and Wave 2 is due in November with even more characters and content. Age of Calamity kind of came and went from the fandom discourse fairly quickly, but don't ignore it! Especially since we've still got a while to wait for BOTW2. **— LUCAS**

Summer Road Trip

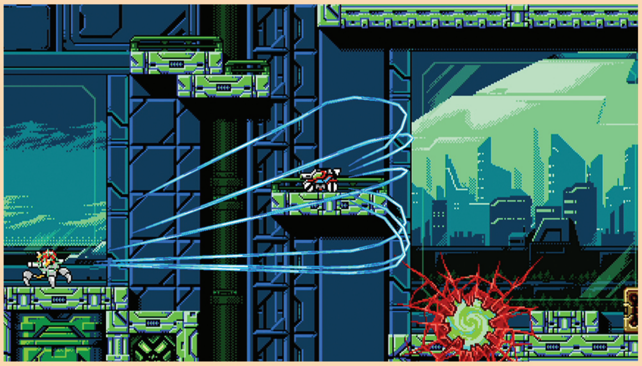
Where will your decisions lead you in Road 96?

WHEN YOU HEAR the words "procedurally generated," what's the first thing you think of? Usually, it's a roguelike dungeon crawler or an endless runner that constantly keeps you on your toes, but Road 96 is a procedurally generated road trip that tells the story of an escape from a country in turmoil. Produced by French indie studio DigixArt (the creators of Valiant Hearts), Road 96 was first announced during last year's Game Awards for PC before being confirmed for the Nintendo Switch in April's Indie World Showcase.

It's the summer of 1996 in the country of Petria, an authoritarian regime that is beginning to unravel at the seams. You play as a teenager who is trying to make their way across Petria to Road 96, the very last stop before reaching the border – and freedom. Drawing inspiration from road trip movies, real world events and the works of directors such as Quentin Tarantino and Bong Joon-ho (director of Snowpiercer and Parasite), Road 96 promises over 148,000 possible routes to take, with all sorts of people to meet, places to visit and situations to experience: high speed car chases, a brazen armed robbery of a sleepy country diner, even hanging out in a limo with a reporter. However, your way forward is paved with danger, with the constant threat of arrest – or worse – looming over your traveler's head, especially as they get closer and closer to freedom.

In an interview with Venture Beat, director Yoan Fanise described the opening story beats, where players would be asked a series of personality profile questions to flesh out their initial character before setting off on their journey – by foot, by public transportation or by thumbing a ride. There are three main storylines and eight characters that Fanise describes as "VIPs" who will influence your traveler's experience, like a friendly trucker, a trombone player who's eager to teach, a tech-minded kid and a pair of motorcycle-riding bad guys. DigixArt has also previewed some of the artists on Road 96's soundtrack on Twitter, including SURVIVE, who composed the soundtrack to Netflix's Stranger Things.

At the time of publication of this issue, Route 96 is in a closed beta on PC (HP's Omen gaming brand and Google Stadia are assisting DigixArt with development), with the release on Nintendo Switch set for later this year. **– REBECCA**



The Trilogy Ends

Suit up one last time in Blaster Master Zero 3.

THE ORIGINAL BLASTER MASTER remains a beloved NES classic, but its many sequels never fared all that well. That is until 2017's Blaster Master Zero rebooted the franchise, which led to the series' first-ever successful numbered sequel, Blaster Master Zero 2! This July, Inti Creates is aiming to keep the streak alive with their most ambitious follow-up yet.

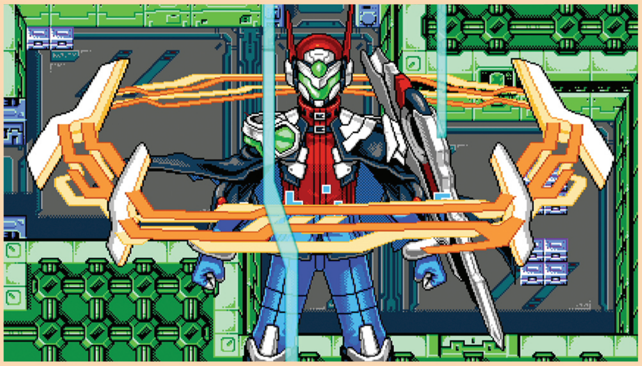
Blaster Master Zero 3 takes us back to where it all started: the planet Sophia, a technological paradise with domed cities and lethal robots galore. You won't be going in unarmed, though, as Jason and his tank have plenty of new and returning abilities at their disposal. The Dyna System and wall jump introduced in Zero 2 are back, so recharging your weapons and scaling vertical surfaces is as enjoyable as ever. As for what's new, there's a gauge that allows you to power up your standard shot, a homing laser that may look familiar to fans of the previous Zero games, a completely retooled weapon power-up system for the overhead segments and, possibly most important of all, the new Vision Reversal Visor or VRV system.

During your adventure, you'll encounter several literal cracks in the fabric of reality. With the VRV system, you can use these cracks to travel to a parallel dimension where everything is far more dangerous – but like the Dark World from A Link to the Past, exploring there can also open new pathways to discover.

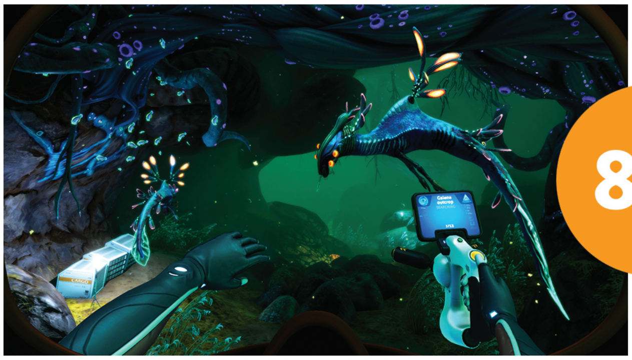
The series' signature "enhanced 8-bit" look is as beautiful as ever, with fantastic chunky pixels making up the bulk of the foreground while dazzling special effects make weapons, explosions and backgrounds pop with excitement. Several sound effects are pulled straight out of the NES original, while the catchy music features the distinct Sunsoft-inspired sound that players have come to love.

Blaster Master Zero 3 claims to be the final chapter in the trilogy, and is pulling out all the stops in terms of mythological fanservice, including appearances from Kane, Jennifer and the Metal Attacker from the original Famicom game Metafight!

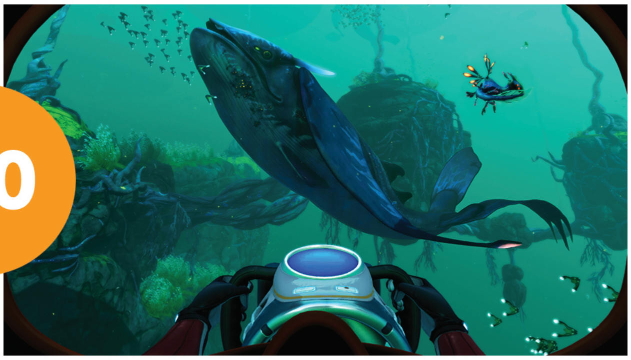
The standard version is digital-only, but Limited Run Games is publishing a physical version that includes all-new voice acting (originally created for the Japan-exclusive Trilogy compilation). No matter which version you get, though, longtime fans and newcomers alike have a lot to be excited about! **– KRIS**



REVIEWS



8.0



Into the Darkest Depths

SUBNAUTICA: BELOW ZERO

GROUND LEVEL ISN'T the lowest low. Even digging will only get you down so far. No, if you want to descend into the darkest depths to discover on all of planet Earth, you're going to have to dive. You're going to have to go underwater.

Subnautica: Below Zero lets you do just that . . . except not on planet Earth. This is an extraterrestrial diving adventure in which you play as a space-faring swimmer stranded on an alien world. The surface is harsh: snow-covered, windswept and lacking almost any resources that could possibly help you to survive. Your salvation, then, lies below the waves.

Striking out from your submerged home base – a single, small pod that seems to have been the only piece of your spaceship to survive the crash landing intact – you venture out into the alien ocean, exploring little by little, seeking out and gathering any kind of plants, animals or minerals that might help you make it through one more night. These raw materials can then be brought back to base and transformed by the life-saving Fabricator located inside into tools, food and the more refined materials needed to fabricate increasingly more complex items over time.

It's a slow process. You start out with literally nothing except the diving suit you happened to already be wearing when you crashed. You have to patiently explore and expand your capabilities bit by bit, from first making a simple knife all the way up to truly mastering survival by gaining the power to construct huge, customized buildings to serve as bigger, better bases. (You don't want to live in a tiny little pod forever, you know!)

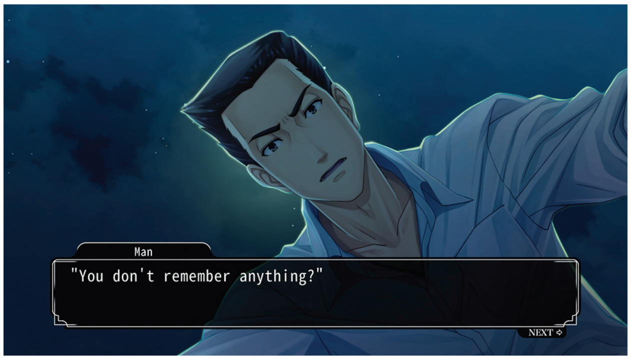
My problem? Impatience. I was intrigued by images of this game in action like the ones I've placed on this page: wild underwater alien creatures lurking down in the deepest reaches imaginable. You can't see them right away. You can barely hold your breath long enough to dive down 50 meters or so at first, and then an annoying "OXYGEN!" sound reminds you that you're about to drown and need to surface immediately. Bobbing up and down for just a few seconds at a time, picking up rocks and grabbing fish and slowly making progress toward more sustainable survival . . . that wasn't my vibe.

Luckily, the developers took that into account! There are four different ways to play Subnautica: Below Zero. Survival, as I've described, is normal. Then there's Freedom mode, which eliminates your need to hunt for food and fresh water, freeing you up a bit. Then Hardcore mode, which is for extreme survivalists – it's got just one life for your castaway, so if you trip up once, that's it. Game Over.

But the one that resonated with me the best was Creative mode, as it deactivates all the survival stuff – even your oxygen meter – and just lets you freely explore the entire expanse of the environment at your own pace. That's what clicks with me: being able to dive down as deep as I want, whenever I want, and hunt for these wild alien whales and crabs and sharks without any worries at all.

Subnautica: Below Zero is a great example of a game that succeeds by simply offering its players a choice of how they'd like to play. Had I been forced into Survival mode, I would not have liked it nearly as much. But as it is, it's great! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: UNKNOWN WORLDS ENT.
RATING: E10+



On the Case 33 Years Late

FAMICOM DETECTIVE CLUB: THE MISSING HEIR & THE GIRL WHO STANDS BEHIND

I FOUND MYSELF solving two types of mysteries while playing Famicom Detective Club.

The first, of course, is the dramatic and twisty casework the game presents to you as the young detective assistant protagonist working for the Utsugi Detective Agency. The second is figuring out what combination of actions it takes to progress the story forward, which at times can be convoluted, tedious and a product of aged game design.

The series originally released more than 33 years ago in Japan with 1988's Famicom Detective Club: The Missing Heir and its 1989 prequel, The Girl Who Stands Behind. These 2021 remakes for Nintendo Switch mark the first time the games have been localized for Western audiences. They're available in the eShop individually for $34.99, but if you buy one, you then get $10 off on the other.

So, do these games stand the test of time, and are they worth the time? After playing them both, I say yes – but make sure to jump in with some patience in terms of gameplay and story. Both games take a little while to get started, but once they do, buckle up, 'cause you're in for a wild ride.

The first question you may have is "Which game should I start with?"

Although The Missing Heir was released first, The Girl Who Stands Behind takes place a few years before it, storywise. When the remakes were first revealed, I remember seeing questions about this, and I was curious too. Is it better to play them in release order, or in the story's chronological order?

I decided to play them in release order with The Missing Heir first, and this is the order I would recommend to other players.

In The Missing Heir, our protagonist (whom you get to name), has amnesia. As the player, you have to navigate this too and learn bits and pieces of his past as he slowly remembers them. Eventually, you get some juicy reveals – but if you play The Girl Who Stands Behind first, some won't be a surprise to you.

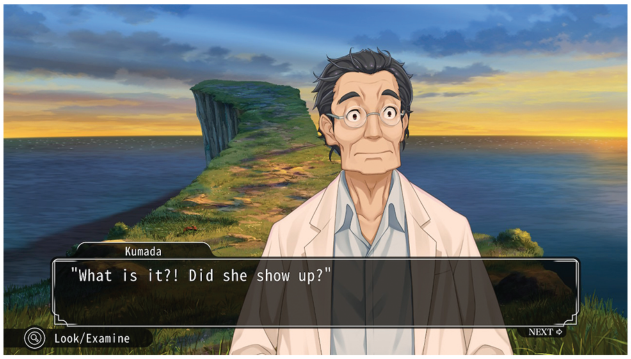
The other reason is The Girl Who Stands Behind expands on some gameplay elements from The Missing Heir. You get to make more dialogue choices with characters, and you have more opportunities to connect the dots between the people you've met and the clues you've gathered at the end of each chapter.

Beyond these differences and their individual cases, The Missing Heir and The Girl Who Stands Behind offer similar experiences – in both good ways and bad. The games are about seven to eight hours in length each and tell a story divided into 11 chapters. The remakes' art style provides a beautiful aesthetic in terms of environments and character design.

The characters have a great range of expressions, and I took way too many screenshots while playing as a result! Other welcome additions include Japanese voice acting and a great soundtrack that enhances the setting, whether it's peaceful, tense or violent.

You control the protagonist in a mostly static, first-person perspective and complete actions from a menu to learn new information. They include engaging characters, talking to them about different subjects, showing them items, examining surroundings, reflecting on information you've received and traveling among locations.

In several instances, you'll know what action you need to take to advance the story and extract the information you need. It could be as easy as asking a villager about a



murder victim once or twice until they've said everything they know. Sometimes the game will even give you hints by turning the normally white text to yellow to show you what you need to do next.

However, there are also plenty of situations where I got stuck trying to progress the story, and what it took to do so wasn't intuitive at all.

One instance in The Missing Heir brings you to an empty field where a body was found. No one is around, but to progress the story you have to use the "Call/Engage" action (which grabs the attention of a person) *three times* before a witness pops up out of nowhere that you can question. Another example in The Girl Who Stands Behind required me to travel to a different location just to use the "Think" action before going right back to where I was to get new information. These instances were frustrating and took me out of the experience while playing. Thankfully the mysteries are so good that I wanted to grind through the investigations regardless.

As mentioned, our detective protagonist is dealing with amnesia at the start of The Missing Heir, but that doesn't mean he can take a break from the case at hand. With his fellow detective assistant Ayumi Tachibana, he's tasked with recovering his memories and investigating the unusual death of Kiku Ayashiro, the head of a wealthy family. There's much more to the Ayashiro family and the tragedies it has faced, and there are several crazy reveals in the last few chapters.

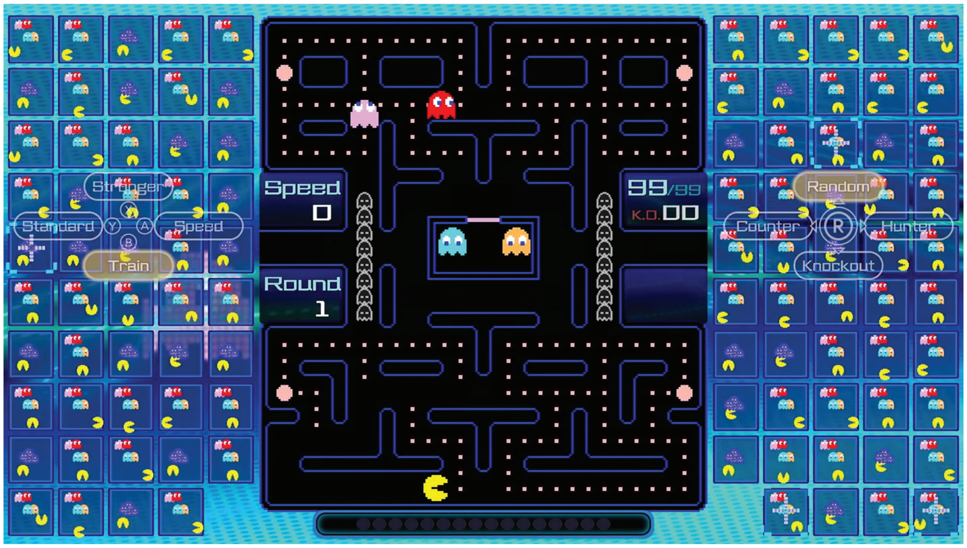
The Missing Heir is only slightly edged out in terms of story by The Girl Who Stands Behind, which kept me guessing until the final chapter. In it, we get to see how our protagonist began his work with detective Shunsuke Utsugi two years before The Missing Heir. It involves a case that blends together a recent murder, a crime committed 15 years before and a supernatural legend associated with Ushimitsu High School.

That's all I want to say about these stories, because you really should experience them with little background knowledge! If you're a fan of visual novels, adventure games and/or mysteries, I think you'll enjoy what Famicom Detective Club has to offer. Just be prepared for the gameplay to test your patience!

– MAGGIE

8.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: MAGES RATING: T



SWITCH PUBLISHER: BANDAI NAMCO
DEVELOPER: ARIKA RATING: E

8.5

Outchomp a Pack of Pacs

PAC-MAN 99

PAC-MAN 99 TAKES the 41-year-old arcade classic notorious for being fun to play but hard to master and makes it infinitely more complicated and manic by turning it into an online battle royale. Players have Inky, Blinky, Pinky and Clyde to deal with per usual, and of course eating dots is key – but the real enemies are the 98 other players who are trying to survive the maze longer than you.

You never clear the maze in this version, but rather must eat a specific number of dots to trigger the fruit, which resets the board. Players can pick a power-up with the A, B, X or Y buttons, and they must also select a target for their attacks.

First, the power-ups. A power-up is initiated when grabbing a power pellet. "Standard" is the default, which essentially means there is no change other than the normal action of making the ghosts in the play field frightened so Pac-Man can eat them. When Pac-Man eats a ghost, it then manifests itself on other players' boards in the form of a Jammer Pac-Man. Yellow Jammers slow Pac-Man down when he hits them, while the red Jammers that appear toward the end of the game kill on contact. They're slow, but can easily become overwhelming if not dealt with.

Grabbing a power pellet kills all the yellow Jammers, and grabbing the fruit kills the red ones. Having the "Stronger" power-up means you send more Jammers, but your power pellet time is much shorter.

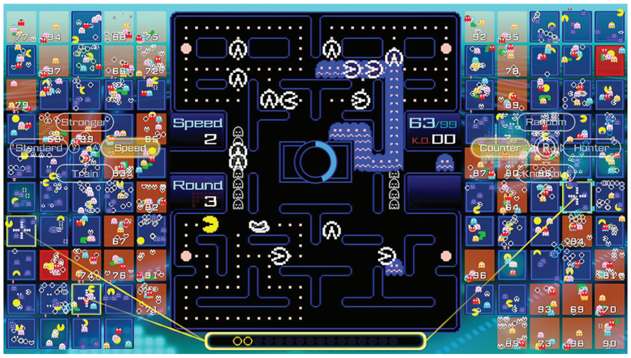
Next up is "Train," a power-up that adds extra ghosts onto the ghost train you create by waking the sleeping ghosts on the board. The trade-off is that you receive a self-inflicted Jammer Pac-Man for each additional ghost you add.

Finally, "Speed" allows Pac-Man to be faster, but also sends weaker attacks to foes. This one should only really be used to get out of trouble. A common tactic is to use "Train" early on to build an extra long ghost train, then switch to "Strong" when eating it to send a crazy swarm of Jammers to opponents.

So where do your attacks go? There are four ways to send your attacks to opponents. "Random" is self-explanatory and only targets one opponent. "Knockout" will target a player who is on the verge of death. (It's not clear how the game determines this, but it may have something to do with the amount of on-screen Jammers.) "Counter" is like selecting "Attackers" in Tetris 99: Anyone who is targeting you will be sent equal amounts of garbage, so it's the best way to target multiple enemies at once. The last option is "Hunter," which appears to target the player with the most KOs or the one who's sending the most attacks. Regardless, it targets the biggest threat.

The game is very challenging, and earning the title of Pac-One during a match – meaning the player is the last standing Pac-Man – is quite a feat. The added strategy of selecting things can be hard to manage, but after practicing it becomes more necessary and it starts to click.

Being a free game (outside of DLC options), it's a very welcome distraction from the grief of losing Super Mario Bros. 35. **– BRETT**



Send in the Clones

STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO

REPUBLIC COMMANDO IS not the best Star Wars game.

It's not even the best Star Wars game from the year it was released – that honor goes to either LEGO Star Wars or Battlefront II, depending on your preference.

That said, I have a real soft spot for this flawed gem. If there's one thing that's often true of Star Wars, it's that even when the franchise is not at its best, it's still pretty fun if you just sit back and enjoy the ride.

There's nothing new under Tatooine's twin suns, and if you've been watching Disney's latest animated Star Wars series, The Bad Batch, you'll already have the gist of the plot: The eponymous commandos are a special strike team of elite troopers who get sent in for high-risk missions that other clones can't handle.

In practice, this means a fairly generic first-person sci-fi shooter with light horror elements. When it was initially released, Republic Commando was often compared to Metroid Prime. To a certain extent, this is justified. Anyone who remembers the GameCube Metroid games fondly will feel a wave of nostalgia at seeing Republic Commando's blocky, dirty sci-fi polygons. The HUD in Republic Commando is suspiciously similar to the view from Samus Aran's visor; there are plenty of tense moments with weird and wonderful aliens hiding in dark caves, just waiting to explode all over you.

Where the Metroid Prime comparison falls short is in the level design. Instead of Prime's meticulously planned, interconnected world, Republic Commando is built up of a series of fairly linear and somewhat uninspired levels. The objective, more often than not, is simply to shoot a bunch of stuff, then move on.

The game's big selling point is its team-based gameplay, as you're able to order around three other clone troopers who each have their own unique skills. Alas, as they're all controlled by circa-2005 video game A.I., they're not exactly reliable comrades. More often than not, the ability to command your team boils down to little more than contextual button prompts, as you order your demolition guy to blow up a destructible door or task your tech expert to slice into the only computer in an otherwise bare room. There's a lot of wasted potential, as your teammates never really feel like living people.

Aspyr's Star Wars Switch ports are all fairly threadbare, and with Republic Commando in particular, there have been reports of janky performance, slowdown and lag. The game has been patched since launch to try to fix this, but issues still persist, particularly early on.

In all honesty, given the fact that the game looks fairly dated anyway, and considering that I'd already mentally prepared myself for poor performance before playing, I didn't feel like this bothered me too much, even before the patch to improve performance. I can't say that it won't prove annoying, but personally, I'm willing to forgive a little slowdown in this particular game. I've played worse.

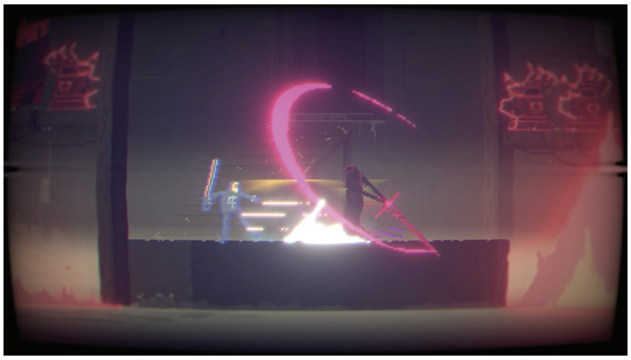
Though I've had a lot of negative things to say about Republic Commando, I actually enjoyed my time with it. This is probably heavily influenced by nostalgia, so I can't say that everyone will get as much out of it as I do – but despite being less than perfect, it's still a decent Star Wars shooter.

The Jedi Knight games remain the best Star Wars games on the Nintendo Switch, but if you keep your expectations low and take Republic Commando for what it is, you can certainly have fun with this imperfect sci-fi shooter.

– MATTHEW L.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ASPYR DEVELOPERS: LUCASARTS & ASPYR RATING: T

7.0



Save the Digital Kingdom!

NARITA BOY

WANT TO SEE what it's like to live inside a computer? It's a question that a lot of games and movies have asked, starting with Disney's Tron back in 1983. Narita Boy shamelessly lifts from that film from start to finish, infusing it with weirdness that feels right out of No More Heroes: Travis Strikes Again. It's a mixed-up tone to take, but as a huge fan of both those influences, I was transfixed; sucked right into the game world alongside the titular hero.

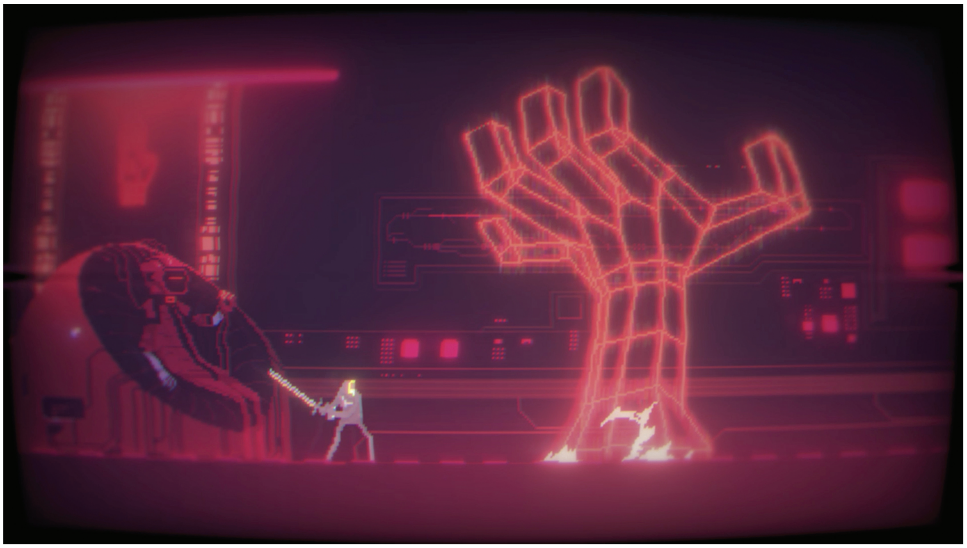
After getting access to his tri-color sword, our mysterious man-child is quick to discover that the humanoid programs in his PC have their own jobs, their own pets and even their own religion! It's your job to find their god's missing thoughts, strewn throughout the pixelated countryside, all while battling against an adversary known only as HIM. A digital devil born out of ambition and rage, he's released an army of red and black murder programs across the virtual landscape, terrorizing the little computer people and building his power for a stab at conquering our human reality. It's up to you to stop him!

It's a cliché but fun story, with plenty of memorable beats along the way. Seeing the life of "The Creator" through flashbacks is particularly touching. Actually playing the game? That's more of a mixed bag. The relatively small overworld can feel limiting, but even then, the minimalist environments might get you lost.

Surprisingly, the game's puzzle design can help fix that problem. In order to move on to new areas, you must meditate on a teleportation gate, but only after you enter the right combination of symbols. These codes are strewn about in the backgrounds of areas you've already explored, so you need to be mindful of the details to move forward. This motivates you to pay attention to where you are and appreciate what's happening in the now.

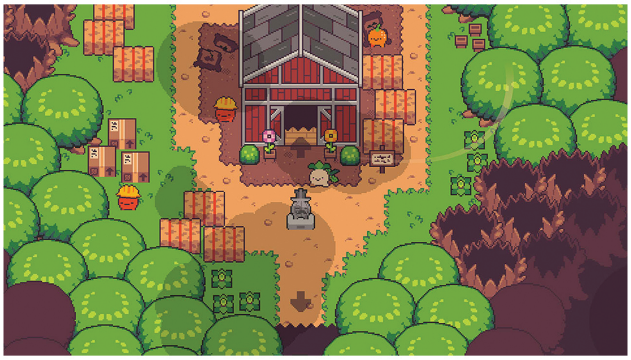
You also gain tons of new powers as you go, and thanks to the game's excellent art and animation, they all look fantastic. But not all of them are very useful. For example, late in the game you learn to do a dazzling lightning strike. You need this move to break through a certain kind of wall and to defeat one or two kinds of enemies . . . and that's it! Out of the game's many, many moves, I used about four of them 80% of the time (Dash, Sword, Heal, Uppercut). The rest are largely half-starts at something interesting. The same is true for the expansive bestiary. There's a huge variety of enemies (including some really amazing looking bosses), but other than a few flying foes and other novelties, most start to feel the same after a while.

When I first saw Narita Boy, I thought it was too good to be true. Three of my favorite things – Tron, beautiful 2D animation and weird indie games – all in one package? Somebody pinch me! Overall, the game mostly delivers on that trifecta, but some of it made me sleepy. Thankfully, it ends with the promise of a souped-up sequel in a whole new genre. Here's hoping this modern digital boy is on to bigger and brighter things. **– JONATHAN**



7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: TEAM17
DEVELOPER: STUDIO KOBA
RATING: T



Take Down the Garden Government!

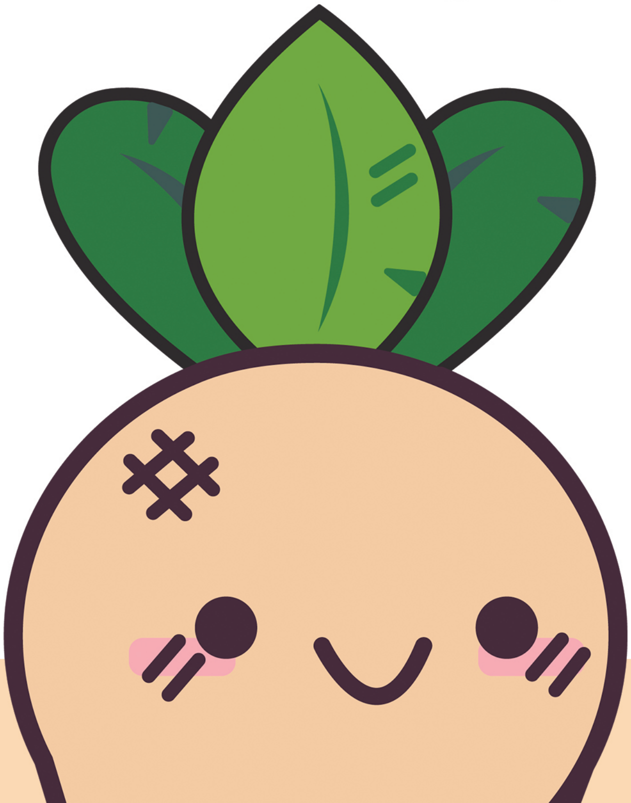
TURNIP BOY COMMITS TAX EVASION

EVEN ANTHROPOMORPHIC VEGETABLES have to worry about taxes? Supposedly they would, according to this post-apocalyptic world where a garden gained sentience through the fallout of a nuclear incident. And Turnip Boy is having none of it!

While the scenario is certainly outlandish, the game quickly settles into Zelda clone territory. A series of fetchquests begin when Mayor Onion repossesses Turnip Boy's greenhouse because he didn't pay his taxes. Other townsfolk also require items to be brought to them for various rewards.

The game does a good job at making the dialogue funny, but it's pretty crass for its cutesiness. Turnip Boy mostly speaks in punctuation and emojis, and the one-sided back and forth of each conversation eventually begins to grate.

The first quest nets you a weapon you can use to kill the unchallenging enemies. The game never really gets difficult – the bosses occasionally catch you off guard, but dying just means you have to rewatch a cutscene and then try again. Most damage comes from the game suddenly surprising you or punishing you for being curious.



The game messes with you, and your muscle memory. Once you have all the items it can get cumbersome to cycle through them, and I'm not sure whose idea it was to make B – almost universally known as the cancel button – the "accept" button.

Another glaring issue is the laggy framerate. The game chugs along in almost every scenario, and gets really annoying during the boss battles when a lot is going on.

The story slowly unfolds through finding various documents that Turnip Boy then rips up. In fact, to find the secret final boss in the game, he must find and shred every document, thus negating Mayor Onion's makeshift government and freeing him from his tax obligation. The whole back story of his parents, the mob and even the humans who previously inhabited the land is fun to uncover, but becomes fairly easy to predict, even in its quirkiness.

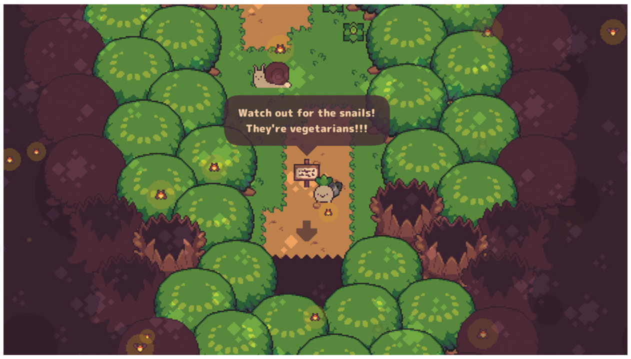
The biggest issue with the game is its brevity: I knocked it out in an afternoon, and was surprised because it seemed like an RPG of sorts. There were also several instances where I thought areas would open up after a boss battle, but the game blocks off areas for humor, almost teasing the player into thinking the adventure is bigger.

Another indicator that the game should be longer is its price tag: Asking folks to pay $15 for what amounts to a few short hours of gameplay is audacious. The game is cute and funny, but I'd much rather pay around $5 for it.

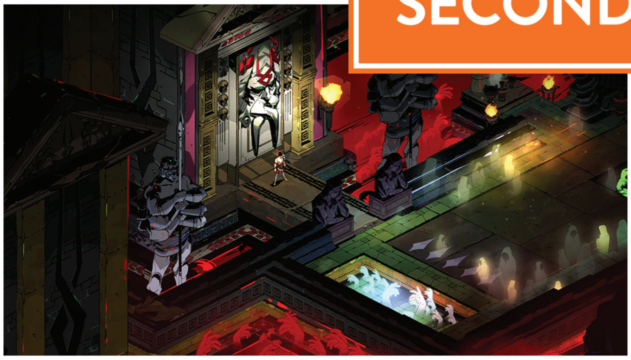
Wait for a sale. **– BRETT**

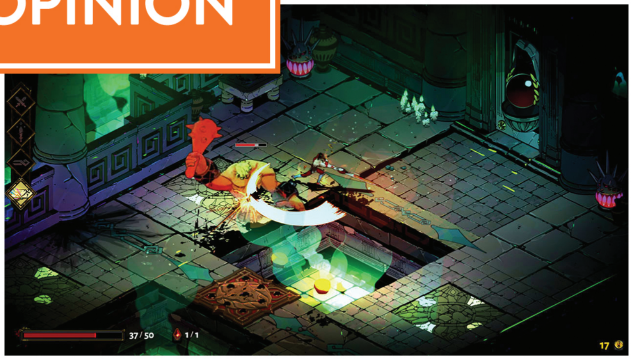
6.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: GRAFFITI GAMES
DEVELOPER: SNOOZY KAZOO
RATING: E10+



SECOND OPINION





Starting from the Bottom

HADES

I ALMOST MISSED the boat on this one.

Three issues ago, Chris presented his take on Supergiant Games' latest release, Hades. He spoke highly of it, praising its addictive gameplay loop and presentation, but ultimately concluded that it was "a great way to spend a weekend" and awarded it an 8 out of 10. Having not played it myself at that point, I trusted his assessment and didn't make any effort to seek the game out to form my own opinion – it didn't seem like a must-play from his point of view.

Hades is a must-play from my point of view.

I kept getting my attention drawn back to it again and again after we printed Chris' review. Hades earned several Game of the Year awards from various different outlets. I saw that my brother had bought it and invested over 85 hours of playtime into it. And finally, earlier this year Nintendo stepped up and essentially rechristened Hades as a first-party title by giving it a physical release months after its eShop debut – an incredible vote of confidence (and probably terribly upsetting to the folks at Limited Run Games, who would have loved to handle that job themselves). So, when Hades went on sale for a few bucks off, I took the plunge myself.

. . . Into the depths of the underworld! Hades casts you as Zagreus, the son of the titular god of the dead who has spent his entire life living down in the bowels of the earth, surrounded by the departed spirits of mortals sent there to be tortured for eternity. Not a place for a very happy childhood! He ultimately gets so fed up with having never been allowed to leave his home that he breaks free of the House of Hades and begins to fight his way up to the surface.

You take control of Zagreus in his escape attempt, hacking your way through room after twisted room of ghoulish foes trying to hinder your progress. His basic set of abilities is fun from Minute 1, as he's got a normal Attack, a stronger Special, a "Cast" that fires an arrow-shaped projectile and a snappy Dodge move that makes movement feel amazing.

But that's just the beginning! Aid arrives for our hero in the form of ability-boosting Boons granted by various gods of Mount Olympus – all relatives of Zagreus who've never met him in person before and so want to help him break free of the underworld to come live with them instead. There are dozens upon dozens of different Boons, each of which enhances Zag's power by doing things like multiplying his Attack strength or adding poison to his Special or making a lightning bolt strike foes every time he Dashes. They are all immensely helpful!

. . . And then Zagreus dies.

Unless you're an absolute professional gamer, your first run in Hades will end in failure. And then your second, and your third . . . but not to worry! The game is built around death and rebirth. Zagreus can never permanently die, and there's no Game Over screen – failing a run just means getting flung back to the House of Hades to start over and try again.

With a little bit of extra help each time! You're never pushed all the way back to square one in Hades, as the resources you gather in each run stick with you. You gain Darkness and can use it to power Zagreus up little by little, activating new abilities like Death Defiance (like putting a fairy in a bottle in Zelda, giving you a second chance on the same run). You gain Keys to use to unlock more powers and different weapons. You pick up Nectars, which can be given to NPCs like the Olympian gods to gain their favor, after which they'll bestow powerful relics on you, all of which give you just a bit more of an edge each and every time you try to make it all the way to the surface.

. . . And then Zagreus succeeds!

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SUPERGIANT GAMES RATING: T

My first successful run of Hades came on my ninth attempt (thanks to a powerful combination of Doom-inflicting Boons on my favorite weapon, the Bow). What's wild, though, is that the game is just barely getting started once you beat the final boss! The story blows wide open from there, and you're incentivized to keep on making more and more runs, building up more power over time and seeing a bit more of the tale unfold with each play session. Spending just one weekend with Hades, as Chris said, would just scratch the surface here – I've been coming back to this game again and again for over a month now and there's still more to see and do.

The dripfeed of new content is so masterfully crafted here! Each time I thought I'd seen enough and could put the game aside, some new plot point would pull me back in. There are characters you won't even meet for the first time until you're 20+ hours deep. There are new gameplay mechanics still being introduced past the 60-hour mark! I'm at about 70 hours as of this writing, and I may just now be edging close to the true conclusion. Or maybe not!

It's a glorious value for the $20 I paid for the downloadable version, and would be well worth the $35 MSRP placed on the boxed edition.

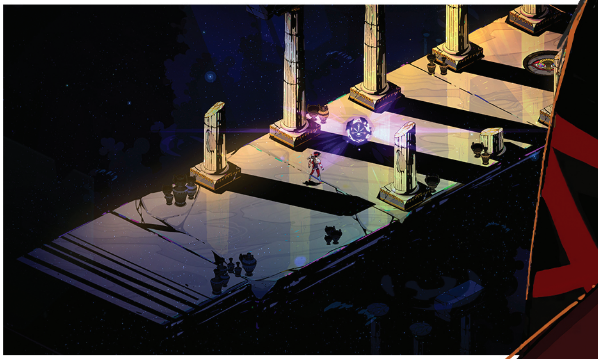
The gameplay is different in every run thanks to a randomized rogue-like presentation of underworld chambers to fight through and enemies to encounter, and the different combinations of Boons you'll get from the gods each time ensure a second time over that no two runs will ever be alike.

And the presentation! The voice acting is beyond superb, as every character is fully voiced and every conversation has a natural flow and is grippingly engaging. The music is sensational, pairing hard-hitting rock riffs that accompany the fight scenes with full, gorgeous vocal performances that accent critical story moments.

It's no wonder Hades has become so beloved by so many! Chris sold it too short, I feel, so please give this game another look if our previous review almost made you miss the boat on it too. In my opinion, it's one of the best games on the Switch! **— LUCAS**

8.0
CHRIS

10
LUCAS



HIGHEST HIGHS

LOWEST LOWS

Skyward Sword soars . . . and sinks. As its HD Switch port nears, let's recall its best – and worst – elements.

MOTION CONTROLS

AN UNPRECEDENTED CHANCE to immersively control Link like never before was the premise for the gameplay of Skyward Sword. Using the Wii Remote as the Master Sword with the Wii Nunchuck as the Hylian Shield was just the thing so many of us had probably geekily emulated at some point in our Zelda-playing careers.

It was the inevitable conclusion after playing Wii Sports Resort. I remember people saying that the Swordplay minigame was the standout of that set, and many speculated how it could be translated to Zelda. It was likened to a tech demo of that very concept!

That more simplistic movement and gameplay was expanded in Skyward Sword in ways that were technically innovative and bold. At the time, nobody was doing motion-controlled game designs besides Nintendo, and trusting folks to adapt to it in a tentpole series like The Legend of Zelda was bold and a bit of a gamble. Some say that these controls are unrivaled to this day, despite Kinect and PlayStation Move jumping on motion controls later on.

Skyward Sword showed off the brand-new Wii Remote Plus with built-in Wii MotionPlus. Eschewing the adapter, the new controller promised 1:1 actions from player to screen.

Many thought the whole game would just be swordplay and shielding – but in true Nintendo fashion, the entire game had unique and fun ways to use the new controls. Several puzzles required tilting or angling the Remote to place an object or unlock a door. Items like the Bow, Slingshot and Whip all had unique, intuitive movements. Controlling and flying the Beetle item took practice, but it was like having your own drone in the game!

Even movement was tied to the waggle control, like flying the Loftwing, swimming and balancing on tightropes. The menus also benefited from motion, as Link was able to quickly select items, so there was less of an immersion break.

Once the game figured you'd practiced enough, it threw some real challenges at you, like Ghirahim battles and the need to use several items back-to-back. **— BRETT**

MOTION CONTROLS

UNFORTUNATELY, NOT EVERYONE had the same experience with Skyward Sword. In fact, a simple poll of public opinion reveals that the feelings players experienced from playing are still very disparate! For every person thinking the game was the height of motion control, there was another who thought the control scheme completely hampered the entire adventure and rendered it nearly unplayable.

In fact, for the last 10 years, several players' interpretation of the whole game's merit has hinged on the calibration function the game automatically attempts but that players had to manually correct. Many report that the game would require near constant calibration! This quickly got frustrating in almost any scenario in-game, but was especially glaring in battle. Players could fidget with the controls forever when the action was calm, but in the heat of battle, the last thing anyone would want to do is calibrate. It could have been a faulty controller, a misplaced sensor bar, user error or something else, but if it didn't work, it broke the experience.

Another issue is the fact that Link was left-handed in all his previous adventures. Needing to switch Link's southpaw tradition to accommodate the majority of players having right-hand dominance was a deal-breaker for purists. Was the option to have both too much of a technical challenge for Nintendo? Did it break the game? We may never know, but alienating any portion of your audience is generally a bad plan.

Oftentimes when the game asks too much of the player (and the game often gets intense in its many boss battles), many players decried that having a more traditional button scheme would have saved them time and energy. And rage! Not having a traditional control scheme mapped to the Wii Classic Controller as an option led many to state that Nintendo was forcing motion on players. Were they so proud of their tech that they forgot the traditional gamer? What about Nintendo touting they were going after a broader demographic? How could they simultaneously release a game for traditional gamers that alienated said gamers? **— BRETT**

THE ORIGIN POINT

ZELDA SCHOLARS HAVE long argued the series' timeline and individual games' placement on it. Their desire to make sense of the senseless has led to cries of anguish aimed at the keepers of the canon at Nintendo HQ. So while Skyward Sword's narrative may not have provided the mea culpa fans desired, it could at least be deemed a breath of fresh air – at last, a definitive origin to the entire saga. The cauldron from whence the Zelda chronicles bubbled into existence!

(To those who will first experience Skyward Sword through the upcoming HD remaster, be warned that this breakdown contains story spoilers.)

Behold: There is no Hyrule, only a surface world untouched by human hands for generations. Above the clouds is Skyloft, a floating paradise upon which its denizens pray to the Goddess Hylia. The kidnapping of Zelda – not a princess in this chapter, shockingly enough – sets off a chain of events that sees the people return to terra firma and initiates the everlasting struggle between the Goddess' earthbound avatar, her chosen hero and an immortal evil.

Zelda learns that she is indeed Hylia reborn, destined to reincarnate alongside a young warrior named Link who will defend her always and forever. Meanwhile, the demon Demise, whose assault on the land sent the populace skyward, casts a curse in his dying breath, promising that an agent of his malice will always be a thorn in the Goddess' side – this prophecy is fulfilled in the future, taking form ages later as the desert bandit Ganondorf.

And at the heart of this tale is the Goddess Sword, entrusted to Hylia's champion in his quest to rescue Zelda and thwart Demise's revival. After the sword is tempered in the three Sacred Flames, followed by a final blessing from Zelda herself, it's transformed into none other than the legendary Blade of Evil's Bane, the Master Sword! However, to better understand the scope of this mighty weapon's potential, Link requires the aid of a sword spirit who . . . uhhh . . . certainly leaves an impression . . . **– TONY**

FI IN YOUR FACE

WHEN THE ZELDA series leapt into the third dimension, Nintendo figured that players would require additional guidance to acclimate themselves to the revamped controls and perspective. This guidance took the form of Navi, a fairy companion who both enabled lock-on targeting and offered insight on the monsters and traps along your journey. Thus began the 3D Zelda tradition of partnering Link with a different "navigator" character – a clever means to mask tutorialization.

At least in the beginning.

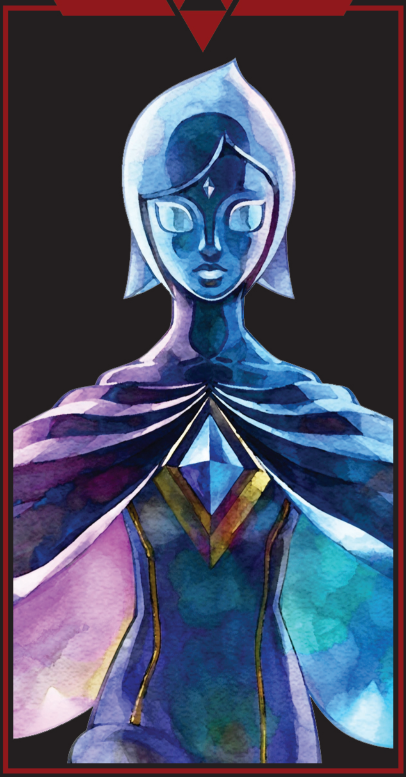
Skyward Sword's navigator is Fi, a spirit residing inside the Goddess Sword and charged with aiding Hylia's champion. On the one hand, the fact that the future Master Sword possesses sentience provides greater context to its importance – this blade is not merely a tool to be used and discarded, but a vigilant soul who calls out to those she deems worthy.

On the other hand, Fi is a wet blanket. A mood killer. A helicopter nanny whose incessant interjections rob players of agency and patience.

Fi's "personality" is the stereotypical emotionless robot that speaks using overwrought grammar and drones on about probabilities. "There is a 90% chance this is a type of key." "I estimate an 85% chance that the vessel you seek sails the sand sea." How 'bout this one: There's a 100% chance that Fi's condescending verbiage will cause severe hemorrhagic distress – if her grating synthesized vocalizations don't rupture your eardrums first! She's the spawn of Teddy Ruxpin and a Speak & Spell with a thousand-yard steely gaze – as in, her eyes are literally made of steel!

But she's totally not a murder bot awaiting kill orders! See how she dances and twirls while dictating a Google Translate dump? Or how she accompanies Link's harp performances with Auto-Tuned exquisiteness? Deep within must beat the heart of a sprightly maiden! Yeah, sure. You can order Siri to recite a knock-knock joke, but that doesn't make your iPhone a great conversationalist all of a sudden!

"Hey! Listen!" doesn't seem so bad in retrospect, huh? **– TONY**



FRIENDS & FOES

NINTENDO IS FAMOUS for their platformers, portables and party games, but they also deserve credit for spearheading the creation of a peculiar, hard-to-define genre: the "Small Community Altruism Sim." One of the reasons it's hard to define is . . . I just made it up. But it's as accurate a descriptor for games like Animal Crossing, Chibi-Robo! and Majora's Mask as you're likely to find. Funny thing is, Skyward Sword might be the last Zelda game to qualify for the label. Now that Breath of the Wild has blown the scope of the series open on a massive scale, we may never see the franchise get this cozy ever again, with so many memorable NPCs packed close together in an intimate little world.

Like Animal Crossing, Chibi-Robo! and Majora's Mask, Skyward Sword invites you to get to know its diverse social ecosystem of characters by asking you to make them all happy. This wildly varied cast is bound to please you as well, with a style that dances between strange and comforting, but always quintessentially Nintendo. There's Fledge, the sweet weakling who needs help with his push-ups, Groose the bully whose thick swagger is equal parts amusing and intimidating, the item check girl who comes to thrive on Link's attention, the little mustachioed fortune teller with the massive eyes . . . and that's just the folks around town! There are also the varied species of friends you meet outside of Skyloft, including clowns, robots, giant kiwi birds, molemen and fish people. The cast of friendly characters sells the experience.

Let's not forget the unfriendly members of the cast, though! Chief among them being the memorable and maniacal Ghirahim, your swordfighting rival. You'll get to know him very well, mostly in combat, as he tests your skill with a blade over and over again. As you come into your own as a swordsman, you'll come to understand him as an opponent, and yourself as a force to be reckoned with. Your tense interactions with him balance the relaxing pace of helping neighbors around town, and both are key components to the connective tissue that binds together the best parts of Skyward Sword. **— JONATHAN**

THE IMPRISONED

WHAT DOES IT mean to be trapped? To be bound to a state of powerlessness? Skyward Sword attempts to answer with The Imprisoned, a terrifying creature who, early in the game, appears to be an all-powerful threat. Battling it pushes you to your limits – but not in the ways you might expect. Instead of testing your skills, The Imprisoned tests your patience! What appears to be a giant ferocious land shark that only the greatest warrior could hope to conquer turns out to be a huge, sloppy Muppet who doesn't do much of anything.

To understand what went wrong here, it's important to remember that Skyward Sword borrows a lot from the Monster Hunter series. Exploring small but densely packed areas and strategizing around the limits of your stamina bar during reoccurring encounters with expressive, highly interactive fantasy animals – that's what the Monster Hunter series is all about.

The Imprisoned was supposed to be the apex of that experience, but in execution, it's the opposite. In fact, it barely seems to feel anything at all, stomping brainlessly toward its goal, step by agonizingly slow step.

To beat it, you must stay out of range of its aforementioned stomps, then . . . hit it in the toes!? It sounds simple (and silly), but due to the awkward camera angle, your targets being attached to the part of the thing you're trying to avoid and, worst of all, the tedium, taking down The Imprisoned can be difficult in the worst possible ways.

Why, you ask, does this monster need its toes to survive? No one knows. But what we do know is its toes can grow back, and so the battle "rages" on in three separate but ultimately similar showdowns. Eventually, your old bully/buddy Groose comes along to help, using a catapult to help knock The Imprisoned out of the air when it inexplicably starts to levitate. It's absurd, amusing, illogical and annoying from start to finish, leaving the player to feel trapped in a mind prison of chore-like, immersion-breaking nonsense. Fighting Ghirahim multiple times works well – fighting The Imprisoned over and over is a bore. **– JONATHAN**

THE GIFT OF FLIGHT

EXPLORATION AND ZELDA have gone hand in hand since the series' very first game released in 1986. Zelda just wouldn't be Zelda without it! The first couple of titles had Link hoofing it around Hyrule on foot, but as the series evolved, so did his means of traversal. Ocarina of Time allowed Link to mount a horse, making crossing the expansive Hyrule Field a breeze. The Wind Waker introduced sailing the seas in a living boat. Spirit Tracks even brought actual trains into the mix! But one method of transportation remained almost entirely off-limits for our hero: flight. That is, until Skyward Sword.

The world of Skyward Sword is fairly unique in that much of its terrain actually exists among the clouds. As such, the bulk of the landscape was designed around the concept of air travel, and dozens of magically suspended islands litter the sky.

One of them is a place called Skyloft, the town where Link grew up. Everyone who lives there is paired with a giant bird creature called a Loftwing which forms a sort of psychic bond with their partner and can be summoned at a moment's notice for seamless sky travel. Just jump off a sky island, and your Loftwing will be there to catch you and whisk you away!

And what a thrill that was! Link's Crimson Loftwing is fast and agile enough to make getting around both fun and efficient. The exhilarating sense of scale while airborne can't be overstated either. The first time you take flight and are given free rein to explore, it's overwhelming in the best way possible.

But Loftwing flight wasn't the only way Link could take to the skies. Long before he borrowed his first Paraglider in Breath of the Wild, Link was given the use of a Sailcloth in Skyward Sword. Similar to the Deku Leaf in Wind Waker, the Sailcloth worked as a makeshift parachute that could be deployed at any time, including when jumping into the open sky right off of the back of your Loftwing!

Epona remains the Zelda games' most iconic mount, and the King of Red Lions certainly had more to say, but Link's Loftwing gave us freedom like never before. **— KRIS**

THE BARREN SKY

THE TROUBLE WITH exploring the endless sky was . . . well, there really wasn't much of anything in it.

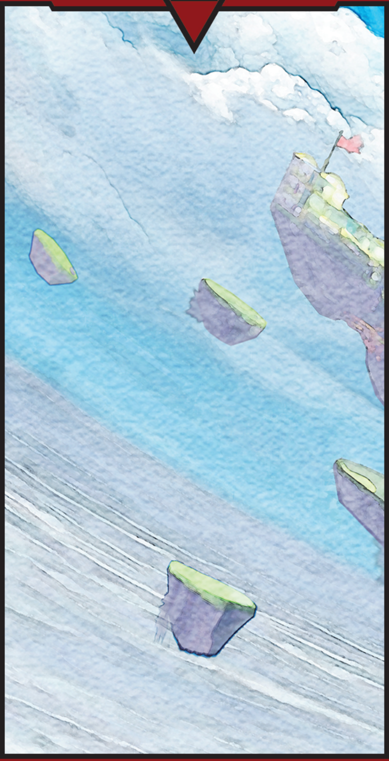
The Wind Waker is still a rather divisive game, but one of the things people have almost always universally loved about it was the sense of discovery in the Great Sea. The game's map was broken up into a gigantic grid, and in each and every square on that grid existed an island. Some were huge; some were tiny. But every single one of them served a purpose. They could be home to a dungeon that's crucial to the game's overall plot. They could be there solely to house some hidden treasure, or perhaps some optional sidequest. But no matter what, they all existed organically and made the world feel alive.

In Skyward Sword, the hope was that Nintendo's designers would repeat that experience with islands in the sky — and with the physical act of flying being much more fun than many considered the sailing in Wind Waker to be, the potential was sky high! But when you finally get to fly freely on your Loftwing and start exploring, it quickly becomes apparent that there's nothing there. The sense of discovery disappears when you discover that there's nothing to discover!

The vast majority of islands you could fly to were little more than just floating rocks with quite literally nothing on them. Maybe a few blades of grass, but that was it. No secret puzzles, few eccentric characters and an almost complete absence of anything worthwhile to do.

As a result, there was a striking lack of motivation to explore outside the path the game wanted you to follow — and even the impressive visual of an endless sky to explore quickly wore thin when you realized it wasn't a boundless world filled with secrets to uncover, but just a bunch of levitating boulders and very little, if anything, to actually do.

It's never fun to see potential like that squandered, and the sky lacking so much in the way of wonder was a colossal disappointment. They say life's not the destination, it's the journey — but this journey could have used a bit more life. **— KRIS**



OVERWORLD DESIGN

THE SURFACE WORLD in Skyward Sword was very different from previous Zelda entries. There were three main areas to traverse: Faron Woods, Lanayru Desert and Eldin Volcano. But while they were outside, each area played out more like an interior dungeon, as reaching landmarks in an area required some challenging puzzle-solving. It was a great way to step back from the tried-and-true Zelda trope of finding a dungeon, solving some puzzles, earning a new item and using it on the boss.

Now you may need an item to get to the area where the boss resides, and then need to use a few items to bring it down!

The areas were more condensed than in previous entries as well, and that played as a positive. While Wind Waker and Twilight Princess had huge, impressive expanses to explore, large sections of ocean and land remained empty between points of interest. Skyward Sword echoes that in its barren sky (as just noted by Kris), but its overworld areas are exploration-oriented, action-packed and full of plenty to do.

While the Skyview Temple, Earth Temple and Fire Sanctuary were more traditional dungeons, places like the Ancient Cistern and the Lanayru Mining Facility definitely tested what a dungeon could feel and look like.

And each area presented unique characters! New races – the Kikwis, Parellas and Mogmas – further helped set this take on Hyrule apart, aiding in making each area feel alive and full of lore. (Though they haven't been seen since . . . hopefully they didn't all go extinct!) **– BRETT**

DISCONNECTEDNESS

AS FUN AS the surface was, the fact that Link couldn't traverse it without having to fly back to the sky was an odd choice. It wasn't game-breaking, but disorienting and disappointing. Why couldn't the Loftwing fly from the Faron Woods to Eldin Volcano?

It's not explained in the lore, but the game designers decided to have two dueling overworlds. The surface is where the adventuring happens and the sky acts more like a hub or warp point between sections of the surface.

Sure, Skyloft is where its denizens live, where Link shops and where much of the plot takes place, but as mentioned previously, the sky around it is devoid of much else. While quicker to traverse than Wind Waker's ocean, the sky still offers little in engaging gameplay.

If it had as much to do to open access to the three surface areas as there was to do on the surface, you'd have a much more connected game.

If it was more obvious outside of a shrouded map why it was impossible for the Loftwing to hop to areas on the surface, the game would benefit and the sky wouldn't feel like just a means to an end.

It's clear that Nintendo heard the criticism directed toward this particular part of Skyward Sword's design after its release, as Breath of the Wild did the exact opposite, making its overworld fully connected in every direction – freedom of exploration ended up being the core of that sequel. It may be an extra shock to the system of newcomers, then, when they revisit this old separated world and can't go wherever they want, whenever they want. **– BRETT**

SKIPPER

THE BALANCE BETWEEN gameplay and narrative is always a tricky tightrope to walk, but Skyward Sword's Lanayru Desert nails it! Upon landing in this region, Link quickly comes across devices called Timeshift Stones. These Stones are activated by a simple strike of the sword, and will subsequently transport the user back in time several centuries to a point when the desert was actually a verdant prairie! Unlike the series' prior escapades through time, this section of the game contains its glimpses of the past within small "bubbles" around each Timeshift Stone.

It's a concept that's mind-bending yet still elegant in its simplicity, opening the door to all sorts of cool puzzle ideas. The present's minecarts and worker robots are all defunct, but revisiting the glory days of Lanayru is just a Timeshift away! Based on which Stones are activated, machines will whirr to life, the boney remains of enemies will be reanimated, trees and plateaus will spring from the earth and doorways will grant new access. And the game takes full advantage of these shifting landscapes from a puzzle perspective, incorporating two excellent dungeons and lots of overworld traversal into this mechanic.

Such a heady concept also lends itself to some strong storytelling and lore as well. LD-301N Skipper is one of the robots you meet: the captain of a vessel that's only made seaworthy when its Timeshift Stone cargo is activated. Traversing across a sand sea is already a great high-concept moment of Skyward Sword, but learning about Skipper's past via a poignant trek through his home makes Hyrule's history just a little richer. I felt that these sequences all really stoked my imagination in subtle ways, without having to remove agency from the player. What exactly happened in this desert over all this time . . . ?

Only Nintendo would come up with a mechanic that could be the foundation of an entire game, but use it in just one area! Between learning about characters like Skipper, solving creative temporal-based puzzles and experiencing high-concept set-pieces, the Lanayru Desert was a real high point for Skyward Sword. **— MATTHEW T.**

SCRAPPER

BUT THE DESERT also introduced a certain other character . . .

At one point near the middle of his quest, Link must trigger two propellers in Skyloft to jump-start the next leg of his journey. One of the propellers is simple enough to activate, but the second one has fallen below the clouds. To retrieve it, Link must visit the Scrap Shop and give the owner an Ancient Flower, which can be used to fix up the robot LD-301S Scrapper. Scrapper then accompanies Link to the surface below, where the hero can search for the propeller and have the bot retrieve it for him, all to finally be able to activate the second piece of the puzzle.

Unfortunately, Skyward Sword has a few moments like this where it feels like your progress is delayed by arbitrary setbacks. Normally, this isn't a big deal since it's a video game, and playing games is what you're supposed to be doing, right? But the criticism of padding in this case is because the roadblocks in question aren't fun to overcome, as they offer little in the way of fresh, new material.

Going further, Scrapper himself is simply a pretty irritating character. Despite Link saving his life, he's bratty and uppity toward him (frequently calling him Master Shortpants), only helping him out due to his having a crush on the inscrutable Fi. Cocky, brassy characters like this have to be handled very well, or else they'll just come across as another Scrappy-Doo.

Or Scrapper-Doo, rather!

All hopes of Scrapper being able to endear himself to the player go out the window with the second mandatory use of him later on in the game. As he carries a large basin of water to the top of Eldin Volcano, Link must ensure he's protected, or else the sequence repeats. The game clearly isn't built around escort-style gameplay, and this sequence can become truly frustrating if you run out of arrows. It doesn't help that Scrapper's laziness is the reason you have to protect him, and that he insults you all the way to the top!

Perhaps Scrapper – like many old, poorly thought-out escort missions – should've stayed in the past. **— MATTHEW T.**

SCRAPPER ART BY AJD-262

PRESENTATION

PLAYERS' DISSATISFACTION WITH the Wii's underwhelming technical capabilities had reached a fever pitch by the time Skyward Sword was revealed in 2010. How could any new Nintendo title wow the audience visually when software on competing machines was achieving far greater heights? Why, by stylin' on 'em, of course!

Rather than build upon the previous chapter's gritty realism, Nintendo opted for a hybrid style consisting of The Wind Waker's cel shading applied to the less-squat character proportions of Twilight Princess. The result could best be described as a watercolor painting come to life, with objects in the distance appearing softer and more abstract – very easy on the eyes, even when blown up on an oversized HD set. In a word, "clean."

While Nintendo employed artistic flourish to mask hardware deficiencies in the graphics department, no expense was spared on the audio side. When even Super Mario Galaxy enjoyed a live orchestra treatment, composer Hajime Wakai knew that they couldn't just rely on synthesized instruments anymore. This was to be the most sweeping, most epic Zelda score yet – so epic, in fact, that Skyward Sword's sound team ballooned into the largest in Nintendo history!

The soundtrack bursts with passion and genius. No more is this quality exemplified than in the game's main theme, "Ballad of the Goddess," which took the familiar "Zelda's Lullaby" and reversed the notes, transforming a calm yet melancholic melody into a bombastic call to adventure. It's little wonder that the work on this score and its positive fan reception would inspire the formation of The Legend of Zelda 25th Anniversary Symphony Concert (included as a bonus CD in the Skyward Sword package), which in turn led to the Symphony of the Goddesses tour that ran from 2012 to 2018.

Nintendo took great pains to elevate Skyward Sword's presentation beyond anything that fans could have wished for. In terms of artistry, this was the most mature Zelda yet. Too bad that maturity only extended in a single direction . . . **– TONY**

HANDHOLDING

AS EXPLAINED PREVIOUSLY, the purpose of Navi in Ocarina of Time was to ease players into exploring 3D space; as players grew accustomed over the years, the need for such guidance would diminish. But somehow with Skyward Sword, Nintendo assumed everyone who picked up the Remote would be unable to so much as locate the Power button without explicit instruction.

Fi gives you no opportunity to fail on your own. Picked up a new item? She'll point out every object said item can interact with, no matter how many times you use it. Approached a dungeon puzzle? She'll chime in with what switches to hit before you've finished scanning the room. Running low on hearts? She'll recommend that you pick some up, as though the incessant beeping isn't enough of a warning.

Outside of Fi's unsolicited advice, players are inundated with visual information. The HUD is a cluttered mess – the entire right side of the screen is occupied by an outline of the Wii Remote labeled with every function; the bottom left corner with the Nunchuk. Though these HUD elements can thankfully be disabled from the options menu, text prompts that appear any time you pick up a "new" item cannot. During an uninterrupted play session, you'll only see those prompts once – but reload a save file and the game will assume you've never even seen a Rupee before.

Skyward Sword also introduced stamina to the Zelda series, though it can be exhausted in seconds with no means of permanently extending its usage. Instead, you'll often see lines of meter-refilling Stamina Fruit signposting when and where Link is allowed to break into a sprint. Could you imagine if Breath of the Wild prevented players from climbing any surface save for those marked by an ostentatious path of fluorescent edibles? It would have been torn apart for restricting the utility of your abilities and forcing you to play at a mandated pace!

Count your blessings that Nintendo's designers learned their lesson and started trusting players' intelligence again following the Wii! **– TONY**

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD HD

Could Nintendo give those Lowest Lows a lift?

GAZE UP HIGH into the sky, but keep your expectations low. The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword HD is nearly here, and while it should be an improved product when compared to its original release on Wii, I don't believe we're going to see any truly earth-shaking upgrades here.

As we've just spent several pages recounting the Highest Highs and Lowest Lows of that original release, let's tackle each topic one at a time and earnestly examine if there's any opportunity for improvement in an up-rezzed re-release.

First up: Motion Controls as a high . . . and Motion Controls as a low. That might have seemed like a silly way to start our feature, but it's an apt one when it comes to Skyward Sword — the game was both the pinnacle of the Wii era where motion was concerned, and also terribly troublesome for tons of players to handle.

Thankfully, right off the bat, we can say for sure that this is an area in which the HD Switch port will improve upon its predecessor. Nintendo proclaimed the addition of a new buttons-only control scheme as the port's standout feature right from the moment the game was announced.

Their hand was forced! Since they began selling the Switch Lite system in 2019, a Skyward Sword port would have been impossible without a way to play it with buttons alone. (I mean, I suppose they could have tried to market a motion-only version as "not compatible with Switch Lite," but I can't imagine the outrage that would have inspired.)

Having a buttons-only playstyle as an option is a for-sure win, as it will open this chapter of the Zelda saga up for the first time to players who might not have been physically capable of moving the controllers around to activate sword slashes and shield bashes. Nintendo isn't always the best when it comes to accessibility, so this is a step in the right direction!

Next Lowest Low topic: Fi in Your Face. There's another opportunity for improvement here! The annoying, overbearing, nanny-like nature of companion character Fi could be mitigated by something as simple as a new checkbox on an options screen: "Make Fi talk less." Having the power to tone her down, or toggle off her "help" entirely, could greatly improve the game.

A button prompt to skip past cutscenes would also be a simple addition. This was a complaint gamers had back in 2011: Twilight Princess, years before, had allowed scene skipping from the start. Skyward then reversed course and forced players to watch every exchange in its entirety. Since SSHD will have lots of returning players who've already seen every scene, it would be nice to let them breeze through if they so choose.

Lowest Low #3: The Imprisoned. As the boredom brought on by the three rinse-and-repeat battles against Mr. Egg Toes was my personal pick for the most frustrating feature in Skyward Sword, I'd like to imagine that there's a way the port can improve upon this problem. I think we might be stuck with it, though! It's possible that a total overhaul of the way these battles play out could help, but I don't think the dev team here is going to put in that much effort. Another solution could be the reverse of the previous point: After you beat The Imprisoned once, maybe the second and third encounters could just become cut-scenes? I'd happily watch Link beat the beast back on auto-pilot.

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: JULY 16, 2021 RATING: E10+

The Barren Sky. The fourth Lowest Low on our list is another aspect that *could* be addressed, but also another I fear won't be for lack of effort. Past Zelda ports and re-releases have added new characters, activities and sidequests – we just spotlighted the Photographer in our last issue, who was added to the DX release of Link's Awakening on Game Boy Color where only an empty square of overworld existed before. Then Dampé came along and claimed that same spot in the Switch remake of that same game, introducing *his* new side mode of custom dungeon construction.

So how surprising and welcome would it be if we took flight on the Crimson Loftwing in Skyward Sword HD, flew out to explore the sky we first saw on Wii, then discovered one or more of those old, lifeless floating rocks in the air had been altered to include a new cameo, or some fresh building with something new to do? It's certainly possible. Probable, though? I'm still doubtful. I feel like if any meaningful addition like that had been made, Nintendo would be promoting it in advance of the game's release instead of keeping it a secret. We're most likely stuck with the same old sky.

The Disconnectness of the overworld is kinda/sorta being addressed by the new fast-travel functionality that's been added to Skyward Sword HD . . . but that feature's locked down to tapping the "Zelda and Loftwing" amiibo (see Page 11), which is a whole other messy situation in and of itself. Being able to freely zip back up to Skyloft from anywhere on the surface doesn't solve the problem of the different parts of the surface feeling too separated from one another, though – it'll just cut down a bit on travel time between the zones for players who have $25 to drop on that amiibo.

An addition that could have been cool? Something like Loftwing perch points on the surface. Let the Loftwing come on down alongside Link! Leave it to rest on a perch point, and ask it to carry him from the Woods to the Desert, or the Volcano to the Lake in a brief cutscene rather than having to go all the way back up above the clouds each time. Skyward Sword's surface navigation is like riding with an Uber driver who takes a 10-mile detour when your destination is three blocks away.

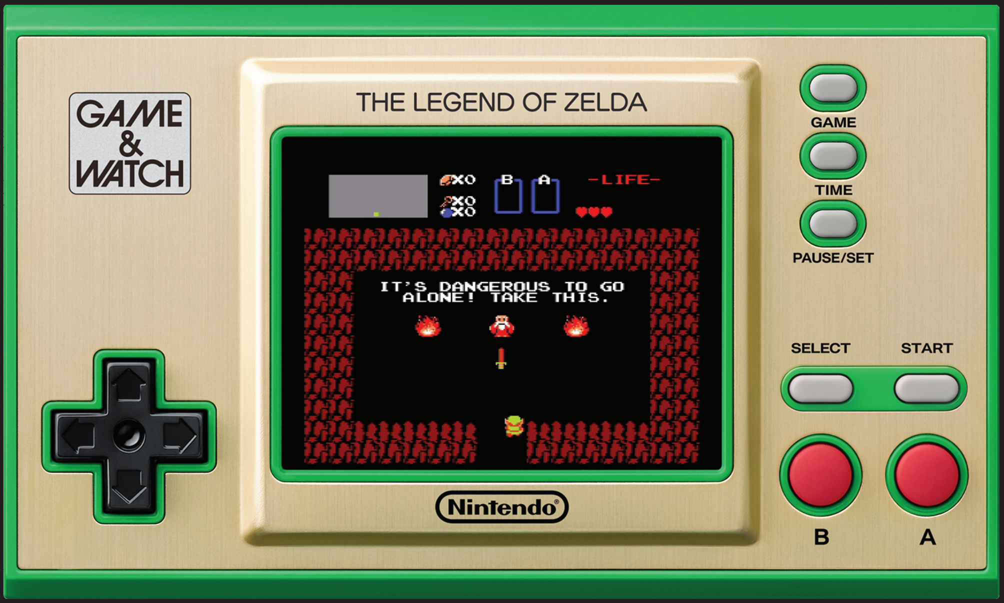
Could Scrapper be scrapped? Probably not. He's too deeply intertwined in how the story moves along. He could get the same kind of options menu toggle box I suggested for Fi, though: "Make Scrapper talk less." It could even make sense in lore! Link could just choose not to repair the bot's voice box when bringing him back to functional life.

Will that happen? Again, it's unlikely. I'm just tallying all the possibilities so that when they *don't* happen we can be properly upset. That's what being a Nintendo fan is all about, right?

Last but not least, the Lowest Low of Skyward Sword's heavy-handed Handholding. I think we might be able to go out on a high note here, because in this area it seems like Nintendo has noted player complaints and acted accordingly. The enormous, overly intrusive HUD that displayed a full outline of a Wii Remote on the right side of the screen (and a Nunchuk on the left) has been removed – and thankfully not replaced by any equivalant Joy-Con graphics either. Instead, as you can see below, it appears that the extent of ever-present player assistance on the screen in SSHD will be the small "Help" button highlight in the lower left corner.

I can live with that. Occasional small control instructions popping up are fine with me too. As seen above, a small graphic in the bottom-center of the screen has appeared to remind the player to hold down L and pull the left Joy-Con back to ready an arrow. I do hope that only happens a few times, though! If I'm 20 hours deep into the adventure and I'm drawing my bow to let fly an arrow at a late-dungeon foe, I want the game to be smart enough to know that I don't need control reminders any more. We'll see what happens!

The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword HD is an exciting release for me, as I know it'll be improved over the game that I already loved on Wii. I'm hoping that I'll be pleasantly surprised to find more improvements than I was predicting, though! It would be nice to let go of more than one Lowest Low. **– LUCAS**



GAME & WATCH: THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

Following last year's Mario version, Zelda's getting the G&W treatment too.

G&W PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: NOVEMBER 12, 2021 RATING: E

RIGHT BEFORE NINTENDO'S E3 2021 Direct, Best Buy cut the price on Game & Watch: Super Mario Bros. by $10. Scalpers were frustrated, fans who had held out were overjoyed, and I was worried. Did this mean that the product had been a failure? Would this be the end of the line for adorable-but-overpriced boutique electronics from Nintendo? Of course not! Best Buy was probably just looking to clear some room off the shelves for the next release in the revived Game & Watch line: The Legend of Zelda!

Unlike Mario's portable birthday party from last year, which came pre-loaded with three games, this Zelda Game & Watch comes with four: the original Legend of Zelda, Zelda II: The Adventure of Link, the Game Boy version of Link's Awakening and a remake of the classic Game & Watch title . . . Vermin?

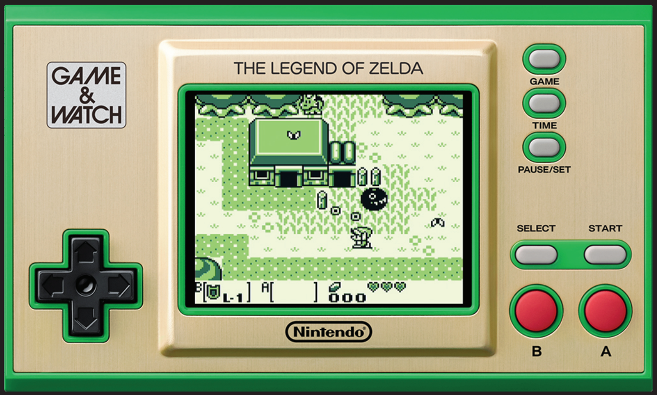
Really Nintendo? Out of all the games from the Game & Watch back catalog, you picked the one named after plague-carrying pests? Don't they know there was an actual Zelda-themed Game & Watch title in 1989, aptly called "Zelda," that was actually pretty fun? Oh well – maybe it will end up being an unlockable in the final package.

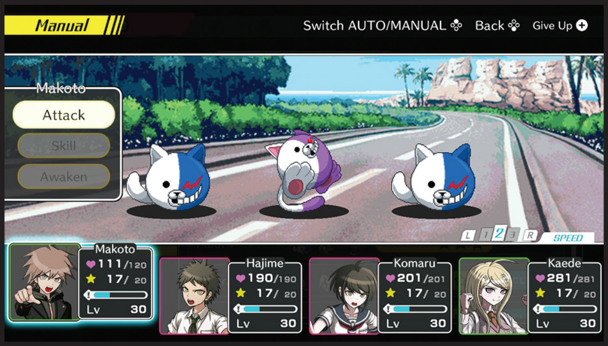
Mario's Game & Watch had plenty of those kinds of Easter Eggs to discover, so it's fair to guess that the boy in green from Hyrule won't settle for second best on the unlockable front.

Link is also poised to one-up his plumber older brother on the "watch" side of things. Not only will this new Game & Watch have an interactive clock that's themed around Zelda 1, but it will also have a timer mode that doubles as a time-attack minigame for The Adventure of Link, complete with numbers made out of little Triforces! Does this mean there'll be a third time-focused mode based on Link's Awakening? An egg timer maybe? We can only dream!

In all seriousness, the Super Mario Bros. Game & Watch had 35 secrets hidden inside it – a tribute to the franchise's 35th anniversary. The Legend of Zelda turns 35 this year too, so I think we can safely bet that it will also have at least 35 surprises to share when it launches on November 12. In the meantime, we can look forward to playing through the first, second and fourth games in the series in an old-but-new way.

Zelda II: The Adventure of Link, in my humble opinion, is most deserving of a second look, especially for folks who loved the Shovel Knight series and want to experience one of its biggest influences. I can almost hear Ganon's mocking cackle now, staring me down from that iconic red Game Over screen – but now chortling through speck-sized speakers, arching that one incredulous eyebrow on a screen that's smaller than the palm of my hand. *Not so big now, huh pig man?!* – **JONATHAN**





DANGANRONPA DECADENCE

Four games in one!

PUHUHUHU . . . you thought Nintendo systems were safe from the mighty Monokuma?

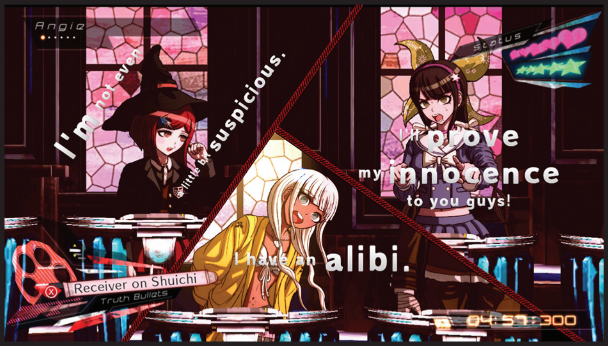
Before he teamed up with Zero Escape's Kotaro Uchikoshi on World's End Club, Kazutaka Kodaka rose to fame as the creator of the Danganronpa franchise, which was a PlayStation and PC exclusive – until now. Danganronpa Decadence is a four-game collection that will be making its debut on the Switch later this year, compiling the first three mainline games (Trigger Happy Havoc, Goodbye Despair and Killing Harmony) together, along with the all-new Danganronpa S: Ultimate Summer Camp!

With a signature visual style and a killer soundtrack, Danganronpa games revolve around a group of super talented Ultimate level high schoolers who are imprisoned by the malicious machinations of Monokuma and his cronies. The only way to escape: Get away with murder! But first, there's the Class Trial, where you'll shoot Truth Bullets at testimony, play mini-games to uncover clues and break down the suspects until they confess and are led to the gallows. There are also mysteries to uncover about what is going on in the outside world as well . . .

Ultimate Summer Camp is a board game-styled side story featuring the characters from all of the Danganronpa games enjoying a summer vacation together, fighting Monokuma's minions in Dragon Quest-style battles as they traverse the board, developing their Ultimate talents and relationships with each other.

While the games will be available as separate titles in the eShop, they will also be available in one physical collection too – and Spike Chunsoft is releasing a collector's edition too! **– REBECCA**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SPIKE CHUNSOFT RELEASE: TBA 2021 RATING: M



SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI V

A tale of angels and demons awaits.

ONE DAY, you're a normal high school student living in Tokyo. The next, you're fighting demons in a desolate, post-apocalyptic world with a glowing weapon and fabulous blue hair! That's just one small piece of what to expect when diving into Shin Megami Tensei V, the latest installment in Atlus' long-running JRPG series.

In addition to the long-awaited release date, Nintendo's E3 Direct and Treehouse Live gave a deeper look at the characters and gameplay of SMT V. The new footage showed the protagonist transported from Tokyo to another dimension that resembles more of a desolate wasteland rather than a populous city. It's also crawling with more than 200 types of demons, including familiar faces like Pixie and Mandrake, as well as new ones to discover.

After arriving, the protagonist fuses with a mysterious entity, gains the power to fight demons and searches for the truth behind their presence in this world.

The series' Press Turn Battle System will return. It puts the focus on finding your opponents' weaknesses and then exploiting them to gain extra turns. Combat skills include physical and elemental attacks, healing spells and status effects. You can also negotiate with demons to get them to join your side and fuse them to become more powerful beings.

While SMT V's plot details still remain scarce, a few tidbits were revealed: Humans once lived in this world, and the setting also hosted a fierce battle between angels and demons around 18 years before the game begins.

These details left me with more questions than answers, but I'm excited to investigate the secrets of this mysterious world when SMT V arrives later this year! **– MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SEGA DEVELOPER: ATLUS RELEASE: NOVEMBER 12, 2021 RATING: M

THE GREAT ACE ATTORNEY CHRONICLES

Finally available in English? No objections here!

THE NEXT CHAPTERS – or more accurately, the beginning chapters – of the Ace Attorney franchise are finally making their way Westward. The Great Ace Attorney Chronicles, an updated version of the previously Japan-only Dai Gyakuten Saiban duology for the Nintendo 3DS, is set to make its grand debut on the Nintendo Switch this July 27, after sitting in localization limbo for many years.

The existence of this collection (as well as a presentation about its localization process) was first revealed to the world in a rather criminal way through the data breach Capcom suffered in 2020 (see Issue #50 for further explanation), but in April, series creator and director Shu Takumi made it official on Capcom's social media channels. And fans couldn't be happier!

THE GAME'S AFOOT

Chronicles takes place in two parts, subtitled Adventures and Resolve, and revolves around the legal career of a young Japanese lawyer named Ryunosuke Naruhodo, his assistant, Susato Mikotoba, as well as London-based detective Herlock Sholmes and *his* assistant, child genius Iris Wilson. At the start of Adventures, it's the early 1900s, only a few decades removed from the beginning of Japan's Meiji Era, when Japan was forced to end its isolation from the Western world and enacted many societal reforms – including to the justice system, which Ryunosuke is forced to experience firsthand when he's put on trial for a murder he didn't commit. His best friend, Kazuma Asogi, a law student working on his career as a defense attorney, helps Ryunosuke defend himself against veteran prosecutor Taketsuchi Auchi (a likely ancestor of a very Payne-ful set of prosecuting brothers), and he invites Ryunosuke to join him on a trip to London to study British law in order to help modernize the Japanese legal system.

In Victorian London, Ryunosuke and Susato are once again thrown into turmoil, this time within the British legal system. Their adversary is Barok van Zieks, a prosecutor known as "the Grim Reaper of the Old Bailey" since many of the defendants facing him have met untimely ends soon after trial. He also drinks wine in court and slams his boot down on the bench (and you thought Klavier Gavin was extravagant!), and he views the new arrivals from Japan with suspicion.

While Adventures leaves many questions unanswered, Resolve picks up the action right where Adventures leaves off, and involves Ryunosuke, Susato, Herlock and Iris on the trail of a string of murders stretching from Japan to England, including a deadly explosion at London's Great Exhibition, Susato disguising herself as a man to conduct a defense back in Japan and the uncovering of a trove of secrets both dangerous and deadly that threaten to shake Ryunosuke's world to its very core . . .

"WHEN YOU HAVE ELIMINATED ALL WHICH IS IMPOSSIBLE . . . "

Even with changes in the scenery and the era, many of the staple Ace Attorney mechanics are still in play: You search crime scenes for evidence, which can be examined in 3D for more clues, and interrogate suspects for vital information needed in court. Japanese court trials play out much in the same way as the trials in the original Ace Attorney trilogy, but England's judicial system has a new mechanic: a six-person jury, which can vote at any time to convict the client. Using a Summation Examination, you can listen to the jurors' statements,

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RELEASE: JULY 27, 2021 RATING: T

THE TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY ATTORNEY
RYUNOSUKE NARUHODO

A distant ancestor of Phoenix Wright (original Japanese name: Ryuichi Naruhodo) who would become an ace attorney in the 21st century, Ryunosuke Naruhodo is in his second year at Imperial Yumei University, studying English and living an average life. That is, until he goes out to dinner with his best friend, Kazuma, encounters a visiting professor from England and picks up a casually discarded gun off the floor . . .

In order to protect his best friend's reputation and chances of studying abroad in England, Ryunosuke takes matters into his own hands and petitions to take the stand in his own defense. Great idea, right? Unlike his descendant, Ryunosuke is a little more polite and reserved (shouting "Yes!" instead of "Hold it!" or "Objection!") but just like Phoenix Wright, his true power shines when he's backed into a corner.

Along with Kazuma, Ryunosuke is assisted in his defense by 16-year-old Susato Mikotoba, a proper and studious young Japanese woman who loves reading detective novels – especially the adventures of Herlock Sholmes, whom she's absolutely thrilled to meet – and often acts more like a mentor to Ryunosuke than his assistant, thanks to her natural curiosity and constant pursuit of knowledge. She accompanies Ryunosuke on his journey to study law in London (and briefly returns to Japan to help an old friend in Resolve), and the two of them eventually settle down in the attic of 221B Baker Street to open their law practice together.

point out the contradictions between them and influence jurors to change their minds on the verdict, thereby prolonging the trial. It's similar to the group interrogations that were part of the Witch Trials of Labyrinthia in Professor Layton vs. Phoenix Wright.

The Dance of Deduction is another new mechanic that comes with having a master detective at your side. While Sherlock Holmes is famous in literature for his deductions and observational skills, Herlock Sholmes' deductions can often wildly miss the mark, and that's where Ryunosuke points out contradictions, uncovering potential new clues and information. The initial teaser trailer shows Herlock accusing a man of trying to hide his tracks by catching him with a pair of shears to cut off his long beard, except Ryunosuke corrects him after noticing that the man's hair looks very unusual, as if he were wearing a wig . . .

SOUVENIRS

In a series first, The Great Ace Attorney is being released with both Japanese and English audio dialogue, as well as two accessibility modes, Autoplay (which automatically advances dialogue) and Story (which auto-selects dialogue choices, areas of suspicion and evidence in investigations and trials). There's also a ton of digital extras, which include concept art, soundtracks (including unused variations on themes), subtitled bonus movies (such as a time-bending courtroom showdown between ancestor and descendant) and alternate costumes for the main characters in the Resolve chapter, with steampunk-inspired looks for Ryunosuke and Susato and Japanese festival wear for Herlock. Early adopters (up to September 1) will also be able to download more bonus art and music tracks. While the base game is being released both physically and digitally, there will also be a digital bundle featuring both The Great Ace Attorney Chronicles and the original Ace Attorney trilogy, marketed as the Ace Attorney Turnabout Collection, available on the Nintendo eShop for those who are looking for the (almost) complete Ace Attorney experience.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

However, with The Great Ace Attorney Chronicles' release, there is still one glaring hole in the franchise that has yet to be filled in the West: Ace Attorney Investigations 2. It featured the continuing adventures of Miles Edgeworth and Kay Faraday, but has never been released out of Japan. Could the long-sought localization of Investigations 2 be in the cards if The Great Ace Attorney Chronicles turns out to be The Great Capcom Success? Hopefully they'll find this logic to be elementary, dear Nintendo Force readers! **— REBECCA**

THE . . . UH . . . WORLD'S GREATEST DETECTIVE?
HERLOCK SHOLMES

Basil Rathbone, Benedict Cumberbatch, Lt. Commander Data, Robert Downey Jr. and even Hayao Miyazaki's Sherlock Hound — there have been many memorable portrayals of Sherlock Holmes over the years, including many video games that feature him as a main or supporting character. Capcom's portrayal of Sher — excuse me, *Herlock Sholmes* — stays *mostly* faithful to the original (including being able to play the violin) with a touch of the eccentric that has come to define many of the Ace Attorney series' colorful characters. Ryunosuke meets Herlock while traveling on a steamship from Japan to England, and the young future defense attorney and the detective team up to solve a brutal murder mystery.

Herlock's assistant Iris Wat — excuse me, Iris *Wilson* — is an accomplished author, medical doctor and inventor of all sorts of outlandishly anachronistic gadgets, all at the tender age of 10. (Final Fantasy VI's Relm Arrowny, you're on notice!) She's also Herlock's surrogate daughter, much in the way that Trucy is to Phoenix Wright, but much of her early life is shrouded in mystery as well. Her deductive reasoning powers are on par with those of Herlock's, and she steps in as assistant to Ryunosuke when Susato goes back to Japan.

MONSTER HUNTER STORIES 2: WINGS OF RUIN

Will your Rathalos embrace order, or chaos?

CAPCOM'S LONG-RUNNING Monster Hunter series has carved out a name for itself over the past several years with addictive gameplay loops, expansive environments and a variety of monsters to take on.

This year's Monster Hunter Rise continues these trends (you can see our Second Opinion on Rise on Page 76), but Capcom will provide a different kind of experience for players when Monster Hunter Stories 2: Wings of Ruin takes flight on July 9 for Nintendo Switch.

Wings of Ruin is a sequel to the first Monster Hunter Stories, a spin-off of the core series that was released in 2017 on 3DS. Stories flipped the script on many of Monster Hunter's main gameplay staples: You're a Monster Rider, not a Hunter; you can befriend monsters and have them fight alongside you; and combat employs a turn-based system rather than fast-paced action combos.

These elements return in Wings of Ruin, and it features a new story and cast. You don't need to play the first Stories game before this one unless you want to.

In Wings of Ruin, you take on the role of a customizable protagonist who's a Monster Rider during a tumultuous time. Rathalos are disappearing, and environmental anomalies called Rage Rays are popping up and driving nearby monsters mad.

To make things more complicated, you meet a young woman, Ena, who knew your famous grandfather, Red, and she gifts you a mysterious monster egg. The egg eventually hatches, revealing a Rathalos with small wings, known as the Razewing Ratha, who's destined to bring ruin upon the world.

This puts you in conflict with the Hunters of the land, so you and Ena set off to investigate the Rathalos and Rage Rays across several beautifully designed locales, including the arid Lamure, the icy Loloska, the flower-filled Pomore Garden and more.

Thankfully, you've got some different ways to get help on your journey.

As a Monster Rider, you can recruit different monsters (adorably called Monsties when they join you) to your cause by finding eggs in Monster Dens in the field. The Dens will appear randomly as you play and explore, and after sneaking in to snatch an egg from the nest inside, you then take it back to the stables to hatch.

As you acquire Monsties, you can also develop them and their skills via the Rite of Channeling ritual. This gameplay mechanic allows you to transfer genes from one monster to another, granting them new skills and developing different builds for combat.

Do you want a Monstie that's a Fire or Water element specialist? Or would you rather have a monster that can employ a more all-around approach? The choice is yours!

Each monster's set of genes is structured in a 3x3 grid, categorized by color and pattern, and it gives your Monstie specific abilities. The color represents elements: red equals Fire, blue is Water, and so on, and the pattern signifies the type of attack:

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RELEASE: JULY 9, 2021 RATING: E10+

Power, Speed and Technical.

Using the Rite of Channeling in specific ways can grant you bonuses, too, like the Bingo Bonus. If you line up the same colored or patterned gene in a row, whether it's vertical, horizontal or diagonal, bingo! Your Monstie gets a power boost. You can also upgrade genes by stacking the same type of genes on top of each other in the grid, enhancing their power and effects.

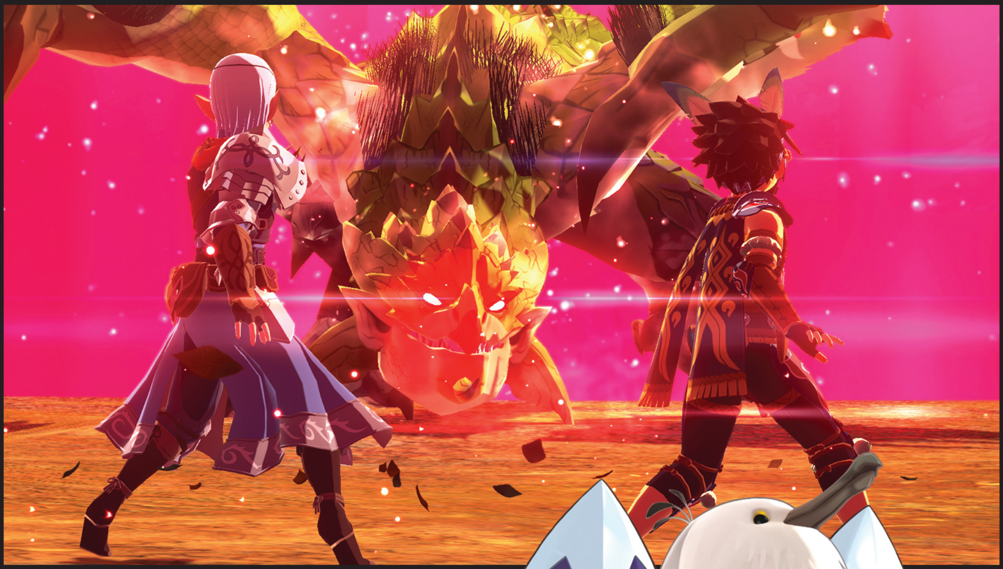
Monster Hunter is known for having complex combat, but Wings of Ruin is a bit more approachable with its turn-based system.

You, your allies and the Monsties you've recruited will do the fighting against monsters you come in contact with in the field. Your protagonist can select a number of signature Monster Hunter weapons – including the Great Sword, Hammer, Sword & Shield, Hunting Horn, Bow and Gunlance – and use them to break off monster parts in battle.

The attack types attached to monster genes also come into play. Power, Speed and Technical attacks work in a triangle: Speed beats Power, Technical beats Speed and Power beats Technical.

While in combat, you'll need to pay attention to your opponents' fighting style to know which type of attack to use during a Head-to-Head, which is when you and your targeted enemy face off. If you pick correctly and hit their weakness, you'll win the Head-to-Head and deal major damage. If you and your Monstie use the same kind of attack in a Head-to-Head, you'll activate a Double Attack for more damage.

As you fight you'll also fill up the Kinship Gauge, allowing you to activate Kinship Skills to deal more damage, cause status effects and prevent enemies from attacking.



There will be plenty of chances to test your skills in single player, and you can fight alongside or against friends in Wings of Ruin's multiplayer. Players can take on co-op expedition quests to find eggs and monster slaying missions. Versus battles allow you to pit your Monsties against your friends' in an arena.

Wings of Ruin looks like it'll deliver for longtime Monster Hunter fans, and if you've never tried the series and are looking for an entry point, it could serve you well in that too.

The turn-based combat and Monstie mechanics seem to be less intimidating than the abundance of action and tutorials in Rise, though you'll get bonuses in both games if your Switch has save data stored for both at the same time. But whether you play Rise or Ruin or both, this is the perfect time to get into the series as a whole! **– MAGGIE**

NO MORE HEROES III

One last look before the launch.

THE LAST TIME we checked in with No More Heroes III, the upcoming punk rock blockbuster from Suda51 and Grasshopper Manufacture, we saw that the series was returning to the open world of Santa Destroy. Now we know that it's actually being returned to us in pieces, split into a group of islands that, when mapped out, take the shape of the city's rose-themed logo. The isles all have their own look and feel – some desolate, some bustling – but they aren't the only places Travis will go. He'll also spend time in space, in locations like "Inside UFO" and "Perfect World." This time, nothing is off-limits to Mr. Touchdown.

The boundaries between Suda's various stories have also been blurred. Dr. Juvenile (from Travis' last game), New Type Kamui (a refresh on the anti-hero from The Silver Case) and Notorious (the wrestler and superhero from Fire Pro Wrestling World) are all confirmed cast members, with more cameos and guest spots to come. Travis' new "Full Armor" mode also bears the telltale emblem of the Death Drive, which is a shout-out to Let It Die. Even the Hotline Miami arcade cabinet from Travis Strikes Again is back! This time, it's in his basement.

Like in the classic Batman '66 TV show, you'll move between the floors in Travis' motel suite using a fireman's pole. Here you can play games with your cat Jeane (who is played in cutscenes by Ike Amadi, best known for portraying Shao Kahn in the Mortal Kombat series!), change Travis' clothes (including a revision to his bearded, broken look from the game's reveal trailer) and communicate with tech weapons specialist Dr. Naomi (who has mysteriously turned into a cherry blossom tree!). If you want even more surreal diversions, you can also order some sketchy sushi online from a personified programming glitch named Bugzaburo, use a "Super Computer" to upgrade your stats and even jump into a Time Machine to replay boss battles you've already completed.

From the looks of Gold Joe, the 9th ranked alien on Travis' hit list, these close encounters with alien assassins will be a joy to revisit. His absurd catchphrases ("Snap, Crackle and Pippity Poppity Poopity POW") and fourth wall-breaking explanations of how to turn his magnetic powers against him are all part and parcel for the No More Heroes franchise.

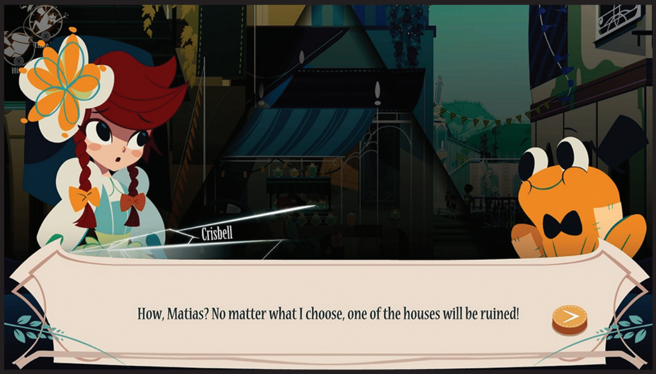
That goes double for Travis' side jobs, now called "Volunteer Missions." Sometimes you'll be plunging toilets; other times suplexing crocodiles. You even race against futuristic sports cars on your three-wheeled motorcycle! Does this mean Travis will go off-road using a four-wheeler in his fourth numbered game? Will he survive long enough to find out?

If not, it won't be for lack of trying. No More Heroes III has deeper combat than prior games, with an emphasis on timed dodges, mixing wrestling moves into beam katana combos and turning the battlefield into a deadly playground with super-powered Death Glove attacks. Winning fights awards you prizes like tape decks and vinyl toys that can be crafted into better Death Glove chips. Equip those chips in your glove to wipe up enemies with ease! In "the biz" they call that a feedback loop, and it's a real good time.

No More Heroes III takes everything that made Travis' previous adventures great and turns them up to 11. August 27 can't come soon enough!

– JONATHAN

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE
RELEASE: AUGUST 27, 2021 RATING: M



CRIS TALES

It's time to meet a Time Mage!

MANIPULATING TIME ISN'T a new concept in video games, but Cris Tales, an upcoming JRPG from Dreams Uncorporated and Modus Games, takes it to a whole new level.

Time travel becomes your weapon in combat, your method of completing quests and changing the world around you, and it alters the way you view the game as the past, present and future play out at the same time on-screen.

In Cris Tales, you take on the role of Crisbell, who becomes a Time Mage and gains the ability to see and impact her world's timeline. Armed with this newfound power, she sets out to combat the Time Empress, who's causing a cataclysm that will destroy the world.

The game's demo is available now on Nintendo Switch, PlayStation, Xbox and PC. It offers more than an hour's worth of content, and in that time I was sold on how the developers implemented time travel in unique ways throughout the game.

The first thing you'll notice though is that Cris Tales is beautiful – it features a hand-drawn 2D world with vibrant colors and an adorable art style. You can tell the developers put serious time into designing the characters' features and the environments all around them.

The demo begins near the start of the game in the village of Narim. Crisbell gains her powers and learns the basics of using them with the help of Matias, a charming talking frog who knows more than he's letting on.

It's here that your screen splits into three sections, with the past, present and future being presented from left to right, giving Crisbell a different perspective of the world. As you move her around, these sections move too and change what you see. For example, if you walk past a villager, you'll effectively see their past, present and future selves. It was funny to see NPCs age up and down as I moved throughout the village.

The game turns more serious when you look to the future and see people missing and the village damaged. But with Crisbell's powers, you have a way to fix it! The demo provides a quest where you can prevent a village building from falling apart in the future due to rot.

Using Crisbell's skills, I created time jumps to the past and future, and Matias hopped through them, allowing him to get the supplies and information needed to complete the quest. I thought this mechanic played out in a neat way: I had to consider what I needed and where I might find it among the three time periods I could see.

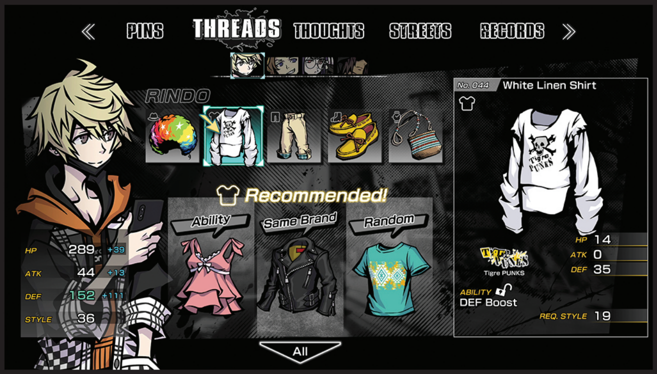
These time travel mechanics also turn the tide of battle. Cris Tales features a turn-based combat system. You have your basic attacks, elemental spells and items to use, and Crisbell can employ her powers to give herself and her allies an edge by sending foes to the past and future.

One example involved two villains who shared a giant shield. Crisbell and her ally Cristopher's regular attacks could not break through, so instead, I cast a water spell on the foes and sent them to the future. Boom, their shield rusted! The fight then turned in my favor, and seeing that combo play out was satisfying.

The demo allows you to see a few instances of how to manipulate the battlefield with time, and I'm sure the full game will have many more to exploit as you play.

Cris Tales' demo offers a slice of the game's mechanics and story, but even in this small portion, the commitment to time travel and how it affects all aspects of the game has me intrigued and looking out for it when it arrives on Switch July 20! Retail copies are set to be priced at a $39.99 MSRP across all platforms, and will include a small wall poster as well. **– MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: MODUS GAMES DEVELOPER: DREAMS UNCORPORATED RELEASE: JULY 20, 2021 RATING: T



NEO: THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU

The Reapers' Game is about to begin.

WHILE OVER A decade has passed in the real world, it's only been three years since Neku Sakuraba played the Reapers' Game – and now a new set of Players, with a new set of rules, is taking the streets of Shibuya by storm. NEO: The World Ends with You is designed to be a standalone title, but it's still a sequel to the original – if you played it, you'll definitely be experiencing some déjà vu as Rindo, Fret, Nagi and Minamimoto unravel the mysteries of the Reapers' Game together.

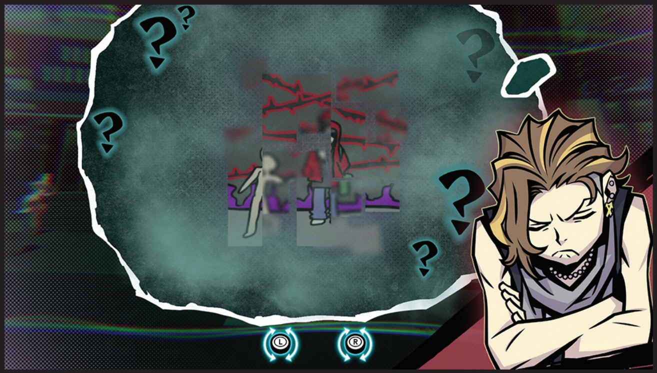
While the emphasis in the original was on partnerships, the Reapers' Game in NEO involves teams of up to four players battling each other across Shibuya. Many of your missions involve Scramble Slams, where teams take down Noise or engage in PVP battles with other teams to win control over their territory. Each team member equips a different Pin, which is assigned to one of the four letter buttons on your Switch controller, and each Pin has a different attack type and button press needed to activate it. Get a "Drop the Beat!" prompt and switch to another character, and you'll get a bonus on damage dealt. Like the original TWEWY, you can chain Noise to boost your EXP gain and chances of better prize drops. Visiting Shibuya's restaurants for tasty food, as well as shopping at its many clothing boutiques for unique styles, will help boost your main stats as well.

Along with Rindo and the Wicked Twisters (see the next page), there are four other main teams you'll encounter. The nervous Fuya is the leader of the Deep Rivers Society, a group that's devoted to exploring Shibuya's waterways (when they're not ducking for cover). The Purehearts are led by Motoi, a guy who believes in the power of positive thinking. Style- and street-savvy Kanon is the leader of the Variabeauties, who help Rindo and his friends out in the early stages of the Game. And then there are the Ruinbringers, led by the imposing Susukichi and including the enigmatic and powerful Tsugumi Matsunae – a girl who Rindo feels like he's encountered in the past, and who carries what may be *the* Mr. Mew with her. Not to be outdone, there are also the Reapers – from both Shibuya and Shinjuku – including the familiar faces of Koki Kariya and Uzuki Yashiro (now both going solo) and Coco Atarashi (who first appeared in the A New Day epilogue of TWEWY: Final Remix). Shinjuku's reapers include Shoka, who first introduces Rindo and Fret to the Reapers' Game, and Shiba, the current Game Master of Shibuya – the one who is seemingly pulling all the strings from behind the scenes.

There are some digital bonuses available with pre-orders: a digital purchase via the eShop awards you Neku's outfit from The World Ends with You, but purchasing from the Square Enix store also gets you an exclusive arrangement of "Twister" as well as a couple of Pins to assist with recovery in battle. They're also offering some of the goodies from the Japanese collector's edition (flip back to Page 10!) in a separate set.

I've been waiting patiently since the Nintendo DS days for this, and I can't wait to dive back into Shibuya when NEO releases on July 27! Don't sleep on this sequel like so many did with the first. Dive in too! **– REBECCA**

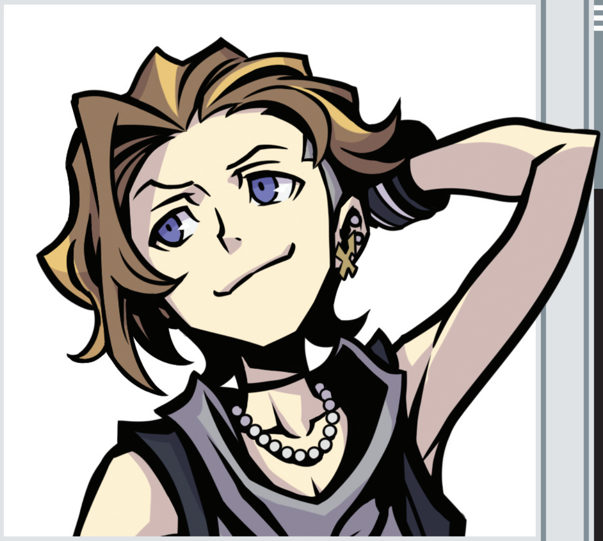
SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX RELEASE: JULY 27, 2021 RATING: T



MASKED UP BEFORE IT WAS COOL

RINDO

The leader of the Wicked Twisters, Rindo is a high school kid who's not much into communication – he'd rather hide his feelings behind his face mask and smartphone like Neku drowned out the outside world through his headphones. While hanging out in Shibuya with his best friend Fret, they encounter Shoka – a reaper wearing a Mr. Mew-inspired hoodie from fashion brand Gatto Nero – and become the newest Players of the Reapers' Game. As a Player, Rindo can scan people's minds, and he also possesses the Psych "Replay," which lets him rewind time to change his actions in the past – like managing to get a special collector's pin for Nagi. He also seems to be having strange visions of the destruction of Shibuya, and some sort of mysterious connection to Tsugumi Matsunae, the powerful young woman from the Ruinbringers . . .



RINDO'S STYLIN' CHATTERBOX FRIEND

FRET

An easygoing and outgoing classmate of Rindo's who always wants to keep things on the lighter side (much to the disdain of Nagi), Fret's apparently big into music (he named the Wicked Twisters after one of his favorite band's songs) and is actually *excited* to participate in the Reapers' Game with his best buddy, "Rindude." *(Players of the original TWEWY, you're now shaking your heads with a knowing smile.)* He nominated Rindo to be the team's leader and tries to keep a positive mindset as the Wicked Twisters engage in PVP and Noise battles throughout Shibuya. Fret's personal Psych, "Remind," allows him to reach into the memories of the scatterbrained and literally reassemble them so they'll remember what they needed to do, much like the way Neku's Imprint power helped the gang in the original game.

WEARS HER PASSION ON HER SLEEVE

NAGI

Don't mistake Nagi for a kid in junior high – she's actually a college student who *loves* to game, and is *very* outspoken about it! Her ita bag (a backpack that lets you display character merch under a clear window, commonly seen at conventions) is devoted to her favorite character, and the Japanese phrase on her shirt roughly translates to "my fave is precious," which is a common rallying cry for passionate fans of characters, idols and actors. She also sprinkles her vocabulary with lots of archaic phrasing, like referring to Rindo as "Lord Rindo." Nagi's very perceptive and empathic (she sees through Fret's facade immediately), and her personal Psych, "Dive," lets her examine a person's emotions directly by diving into their subconscious. However, if you make her miss out on anything involving rare merch, you will face her *WRAAAAATH!!*

HE'S SO ZETTA BACK

SHO MINAMIMOTO

(Spoilers for The World Ends with You: Final Remix ahead!) Apparently summoned from beyond erasure at the end of the A New Day epilogue of Final Remix for some sort of secret mission, Sho Minamimoto was one of the four Game Masters who antagonized Neku and his friends in the original TWEWY, with his math puzzles, large piles of "artistically arranged" junk and his ability to summon dangerous Taboo Noise. Whatever motive he has for seemingly switching sides and joining the Reapers' Game as a Player, it's a complete mystery. "Pi-Face" is still wearing all black and has his trademark bullhorn, but he's missing the distinctive tattoo covering his left hand. That doesn't mean he's gotten weak – he's still capable of powerful psychic attacks, and invites himself to join the Wicked Twisters after saving them from certain erasure.

MARIO + RABBIDS SPARKS OF HOPE

The sequel to Kingdom Battle has been confirmed!

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, the news we've all been waiting for has finally arrived: Rabbid Luigi has started wearing pants.

Oh, and the sequel to Mario + Rabbids Kingdom Battle has finally been revealed!

Ubisoft Milan – the dev team that brought Kingdom Battle to the world back in 2017 – has been suspiciously silent ever since wrapping up that first game's DLC. It was clear that they were cooking up some sort of sequel, but speculation ranged from predictions of a straightforward Mario + Rabbids 2 to a totally different crossover. Zelda + Rabbids, perhaps. Well, Mario + Rabbids 2 turned out to be the correct bet – but it's shaping up to be anything but straightforward.

The grid is gone! That absolute staple of the turn-based strategy genre is no more, as battle environments have been desquared and made more natural and free-flowing for this follow-up. Movement, then, will no longer be determined by how many tiles a character can run across before they have to stop – rather, when their turn to move comes up, a circular perimeter of possibilities will be projected out from their position. They'll be able to run to any point within that radius.

It's an intriguing shift, and an unexpected one – I certainly wouldn't have guessed that the devs would axe such a core component of Kingdom Battle on the way to its sequel. It's a bit concerning, too, in that the new approach won't be quite as accessible to newcomers. Moving characters one space at a time, and having limited spaces to choose from at the end of each movement action, like chess or checkers, is easier to pick up and understand. "Go anywhere you want"? That's more of a challenge.

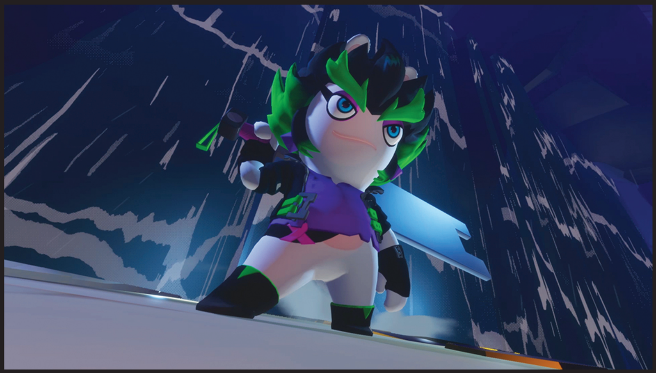
Freedom of movement seems to be the new reality of the non-battle exploration sequences, too, as the mostly linear pathways of the original appear to be swapping out for open-world areas. No concerns there, of course, as Mario and free-roaming environment design have gone hand in hand for 25 years now! (He just never had a gun in the '90s.)

That aspect's getting amped up too, as Mario now dual-wields two guns at the same time, so his attacks can target and damage two foes at once! The rest of the returning cast are all seeing their standard armanents altered as well. Luigi's got a bow and arrow instead of his old sniper rifle. Rabbid Peach appears to have a rocket launcher. And "normal" Peach has a umbrella (seen that before) with a cannon built into it (haven't seen that before).

Not every cast member of Kingdom Battle is coming back, though, as it looks like Yoshi and his Rabbid counterpart are getting cut in favor of the new Rabbid Rosalina, as well as the mysterious sword-wielding Rabbid seen below. Who's that supposed to be? The hair and eyebrows are kind of Bowser-ish, but I'd think a Rabbid Bowser would be more on the nose than that. And what about Bowser himself? Could he be on the side of the heroes this time around? (Especially since his bulky body wouldn't need to fit within the old square grid any more?)

Those questions and many more lie before us, and we'll have some time to ponder them, as Mario + Rabbids Sparks of Hope isn't due to debut until 2022. **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
DEVELOPER: UBISOFT MILAN
RELEASE: TBA 2022 RATING: E10+



SWITCH PUBLISHER: SQUARE ENIX DEVELOPERS: SQUARE ENIX, ARMOR PROJECT, BIRD STUDIO & SPIKE CHUNSOFT RELEASE: TBA RATING: RP

DRAGON QUEST III: HD-2D REMAKE

Erdrick's tale, retold!

2018'S VISUALLY TRAILBLAZING Octopath Traveler already had one follow-up in the works – the tactical, morality-challenging Project Triangle Strategy that we just took a first look at in our last issue – but now another has been revealed. Next to adopt the "HD-2D" style of mashing up two-dimensional character sprites with 3D worlds to explore will be an all-new remake of the classic Dragon Quest III!

In fact, Square Enix is so proud of this approach that they seem to be officially naming this newest revision "Dragon Quest III: HD-2D Remake." Is this just the tip of the iceberg, then? Is that super straightforward subtitle suggesting that other HD-2D Remakes could appear in the future as well? It certainly seems like a strong possibility, now that this first reach back into Square Enix history is happening.

But before fixating too much on the future, let's first focus on what we have in front of us. Dragon Quest III is, without question, the most nostalgia-rich past entry in the now 35-year-old franchise. While it never made much of an impact in the United States – as its localization as Dragon Warrior III took four years to arrive and couldn't keep up with the 16-bit competition of 1992 – it was a massive, phenomenal hit in Japan in 1988, selling through nearly 4,000,000 copies of its original Famicom cartridge over the years. That incredible success has propelled the overall Dragon Quest brand for decades, leading to tons of sequels and spin-offs – but Square Enix has also wisely revisited this specific adventure time and time again, helping the kids of the '80s recapture their childhoods with DQIII remakes on the Super Famicom, the Game Boy Color, mobile devices and more. A version of this same game is even already available in the Switch eShop, and, as of this writing, it's on sale for just eight bucks!

So, why revisit it yet again? Well, clearly it's what the people want! Tapping into the eye-catching and inarguably appealing HD-2D aesthetic should help draw new players to this classic Quest, too, so that it isn't just the same audience of aging '80s kids buying in once again. I'll admit that I personally have never played much of this particular DQ adventure, but the Octopath-inspired art style has definitely placed this new version way up on my radar. It'll be fascinating to see how the classic world maps and character designs that originated in the 8-bit era will be reinterpreted and reinvigorated one more time.

There's also the story hook to consider: Dragon Quest III tells the tale of the hero we American players were first introduced to as Erdrick – the same Erdrick that has gone on to gain a reputation as the greatest of all DQ protagonists and recently joined the playable cast in Super Smash Bros. Ultimate as one of the four skins that all share the "Hero" slot. His tale ties into Dragon Quest XI's too, and decades before that it directly led into the stories of the original Dragon Quest and Dragon Quest II. Series creator Yuji Horii has already hinted that HD-2D versions of those two are currently being considered as well!

Which leads us back to dreaming of the future. Could some classic Final Fantasy series sequels see this same treatment? Maybe a Mana game, or something like Star Ocean? (I dare not invoke the name of Chrono Trigger.) There are plenty of other older DQs, too!

Finally, the event that revealed this game's existence also confirmed another: Dragon Quest XII: The Flames of Fate! No details on that one yet, but it's nice to know it's coming! **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: MERCURYSTEAM
RELEASE: OCTOBER 8, 2021 RATING: T

METROID DREAD

After 19 long years, the main series story will continue (and conclude?) in Metroid 5!

HERE'S A SENTENCE I never thought I'd write: Metroid Dread is real, and it's coming out this year!

A new Metroid game is always something to celebrate, but this particular title carries with it some history. The earliest "public" mention of Metroid Dread came in a leaked 2005 internal software list for the Nintendo DS. Then, the name was cleverly hidden in 2007's Metroid Prime 3: Corruption, though Retro denied it was related to any other existing projects.

In the 16 years since that initial leak, fans have consistently speculated about every facet of its existence while Nintendo themselves remained silent – until now. Metroid Dread, a brand-new sidescrolling Metroid sequel for the Switch, has officially been announced. It's not Prime 4. It's not a port. It's not a remake. It's Metroid 5, a direct follow-up to 2002's Metroid Fusion, and it's finally a reality.

When we last left our hero, she had been fused with Metroid DNA, which, among other things, gave her the ability to absorb the lethal X Parasite, the Metroids' primary food source that had recently grown dangerously out of control. She wasn't on great terms with the Galactic Federation either, since she ignored their orders to capture the X and instead eradicated them by crashing a gigantic space station into their home planet. After that, there were no more X and no more Metroids – but plenty of questions about the future.

It's unclear how much time has passed since the events of Metroid Fusion, but Samus is still teamed up with her ship's A.I., Adam (in a supposedly considerably less intrusive fashion), and she has a fancy new suit that combines elements of her Fusion look with her more classic Varia Suit design.

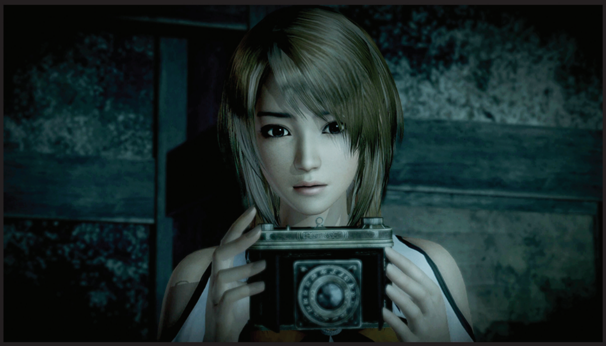
As for the plot, it seems the Galactic Federation has come into possession of video evidence suggesting the X Parasite has survived. They sent out a series of E.M.M.I. recon droids to investigate, but lost contact with the entire unit.

Samus is now on the scene, presumably since she's the only known living organism that is immune to the X – and this is where the game earns its title. For some reason, the E.M.M.I. units are hunting Samus, and they're both terrifyingly lethal and nearly indestructible. Once spotted, they will relentlessly pursue you, similar to the SA-X from Metroid Fusion.

So far, there only seem to be two ways to combat these machines. One is a limited-use weapon called the Omega Cannon (seemingly unrelated to the one from Metroid Prime: Hunters). It's slow to charge, but it can destroy your pursuers. The other is the Phantom Cloak, which allows Samus to become invisible and hide, but only if she's standing perfectly still since the E.M.M.I. units also have a deadly sense of hearing.

Of course these aren't the only new moves at your disposal. Fine-tuned aiming is now available while in motion. The Melee Counter from Samus Returns has been refined and is now accompanied by a Dash Melee where Samus can dive into enemies to perform physical attacks. And there's even a super slick slide move that potential speedrunners will doubtlessly put to good use!

Metroid fans couldn't have asked for a better way to celebrate the franchise's 35th anniversary. This game is said to mark the end of the primary series story arc (Metroid, Metroid II: Return of Samus, Super Metroid, Metroid Fusion and now this), so what exactly that means remains to be seen – but if this game is half as good as it looks, Metroid fans have nothing to Dread. **– KRIS**



FATAL FRAME: MAIDEN OF BLACK WATER

Did we call it, or what?

IN OUR LAST ISSUE, we speculated (or should I say, specterlated) about the fate of Fatal Frame, the classic ghost photography survival horror series. The franchise turns 20 this year, which led us to guess that Maiden of Black Water, the latest (but not greatest) entry in the series would be coming to Switch. Looks like we were right! But we didn't foresee the title going multi-platform.

It's not that shocking, though. Like with The Wonderful 101, Nintendo published Maiden of Black Water on the Wii U, but it sold poorly, so letting its developer (Koei Tecmo) spread it to other consoles doesn't mean losing a hot exclusive. Maybe Nintendo's hoping this re-release will summon up new fans across all platforms who may return for more Switch-exclusive Fatal Frame frights in the future?

Nintendo was the only console holder to promote this re-release at E3, which shows they're still invested in the series, right? This re-release looks great too, with the promise of bonus costumes and extras to sweeten the deal, like a new Photo Mode. It's a sort of creative mode where you can position "characters and ghosts in various scenes and adjust their poses in order to create the perfect spooky picture" — perfect for uploading to social media!

But the real question is, are Nintendo and Koei Tecmo positioning a Fatal Frame character for Super Smash Bros. Ultimate, for a timed release alongside Maiden of Black Water on Switch? If they do, it would signal to the world that Nintendo means to resurrect the series. If they don't, then maybe they're planning to totally ghost the franchise? We'll have to see what materializes later this year, for both Smash and Fatal Frame. **— JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: KOEI TECMO RELEASE: TBA 2021 RATING: M

LIFE IS STRANGE: TRUE COLORS & REMASTERED COLLECTION

Kinda called this one too!

SQUARE ENIX'S ACCLAIMED supernatural adventure series, Life is Strange, is finally making its way onto a Nintendo console. Switch owners will soon get to dive into the franchise, taking on the roles of everyday people who acquire some not-so-everyday abilities and deciding their fates through narrative choice-based gameplay.

In the E3 2021 Direct, Nintendo announced the latest entry in the series, Life is Strange: True Colors, will arrive September 10 on Switch, and the upcoming Life is Strange Remastered Collection, which features the first game and its prequel Before the Storm, will release later this year.

True Colors tells the story of Alex Chen, whose power of enhanced empathy allows her to see the emotions of others through colored auras — then manipulate those feelings. After recently moving to Haven Springs, Colorado, she must put this power to the test to investigate the death of her brother Gabe.

The Remastered Collection includes two games that tell the stories of friends Max Caulfield and Chloe Price. Life is Strange focuses on Max, who moves back to her hometown of Arcadia Bay, Oregon, and discovers she has the power to rewind time. Before the Storm takes place around two years before the first game and puts the spotlight on Chloe and her intense relationship with Rachel Amber, a central figure in both games.

The series is known for beautiful environments, excellent soundtracks, angsty teen vibes and agonizing choices, so if that sounds like something you'd enjoy, mark it on your list for Fall! **— MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SQUARE ENIX DEVELOPERS: DONTNOD & DECK NINE RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 10, 2021 (T.C.); Q4 2021 (R.C.) RATING: M

EDITOR'S NOTE: I'D LIKE TO APOLOGIZE FOR JONATHAN'S TERRIBLE SMASH SPECULATION ABOVE. CLEARLY, YEARS OF PLAYING TOO MANY FATAL FRAME GAMES HAS POSSESSED HIS BRAIN. – **LUCAS**

MARIO PARTY SUPERSTARS

Revisit classic boards and minigames from the past!

AS A WISE cat once said: "We're ready! To party! We're ready!" (That said cat happens to favor Italian food like a certain pasta-packing plumber is entirely coincidental.)

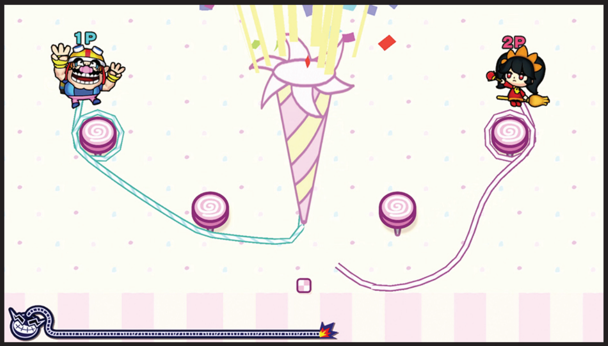
And some would argue that Mario has never partied harder than when the Party series began on the Nintendo 64, which might explain why that's the era Nintendo has chosen to revisit with the latest entry in the series, Mario Party Superstars. Five boards, ranging from Peach's Birthday Cake to Space Land, are back and looking sharper than ever, thanks to the high-resolution graphics of the Nintendo Switch. You can also stick it to other players with new stickers, which let you pester or praise your partying pals!

That's not all, though, as the collection of 100 minigames like Mushroom Mix-Up and Shy Guy Says spans not only the Nintendo 64 trilogy, but also dives into the dolphin-rich waters of the Nintendo GameCube's quartet of party packages, too! Better still, all minigames will support button controls, so you can become the life of the party whether you're jukin' and jivin' with Joy-Cons, livin' it up with the Switch Lite or punchin' it up with the Pro Controller.

Did someone say "online?" While Super Mario Party took three years to add that functionality beyond its Online Mariothon, Superstars will feature online functionality for *all* its modes from Day 1. Whether you want to game on with friends or challenge strangers across the globe, the option is there. What's more, if you're playing with friends, you can even save where you are mid-game.

Now that's something to party about! **— DAVID**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: NDCUBE
RELEASE: OCTOBER 29, 2021 RATING: E



WARIOWARE: GET IT TOGETHER!

Grab a friend to take on new microgames as a team!

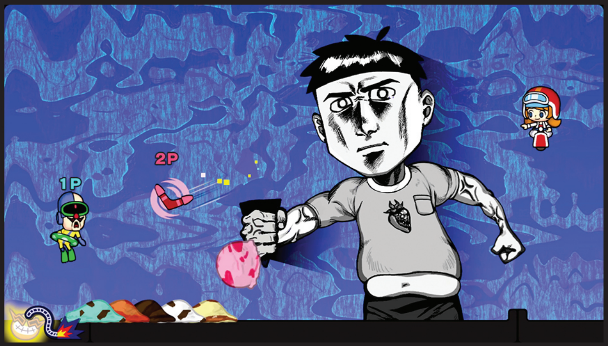
ABOUT MIDWAY THROUGH Nintendo's E3 2021 Direct, Wario took over and introduced his new game WarioWare: Get It Together! – as only he could. *Wah-ha-ha-ha!*

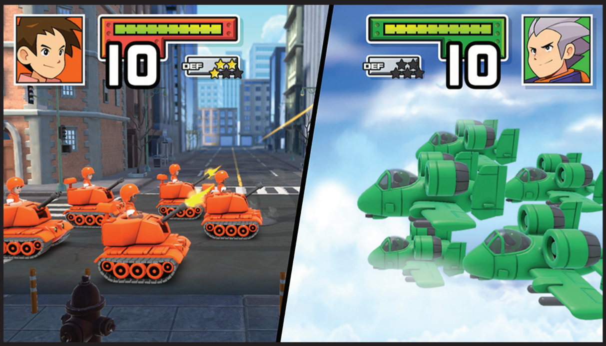
In this Switch sequel, players will pick avatars from the wide roster of WarioWare misfits to play all-new microgames – directly controlling the characters as they fly around the screen, which is a first for the series. Each character has a unique ability, and the game cycles through the characters as you play. For example, Wario has a jetpack and ramming move, while 9-Volt rides his skateboard and employs a yo-yo. Everyone is different! Any character can win any game – but some characters are better suited to win certain games, while others may pose more of a challenge.

What's more, co-op gameplay is in for the first time! Two players can take on the microgames together, and there's a story mode that players can drop into and out of at any time. Each player picks three characters to cycle through, and each player gets one to control during a microgame. If one player succeeds and the other fails, the game still counts it as winning, so that's a nice bonus when playing together – as the title encourages!

As in previous games, a set of 10 microgames will lead up to a boss level. Upon completing that, players can then return to the same level to tackle more games and go for high scores, or progress in the story. With each new story chapter completed, more characters are added to the roster, so there will be plenty to unlock in the initial playthrough! And if I know WarioWare, there will be plenty of bonuses to unlock after initial runs through the game. (I just hope it's easier than Game & Wario's capsule method!) **— BRETT**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE:
SEPTEMBER 10, 2021 RATING: E10+





ADVANCE WARS 1 + 2: RE-BOOT CAMP

After a long period of peace, the Wars are back on.

ATTEN-HUT! Company, halt! At ease, soldiers!

It's been 13 long years since this company has last seen any front-line action, so we're going to see if it's still fit for duty, or ready to be shipped back home to Mama.

To that end, the first two Advance Wars games aren't just going back to boot camp; they're going to Re-Boot Camp! This two-in-one collection of remakes will promote the Orange Star Army from the dingy latrines of the Game Boy Advance to the toothbrush-scrubbed barracks of the Switch.

The higher-ups at Nintendo Command have enlisted the drill sergeants over at WayForward to take charge of these units and get them fit for combat this winter. That means a full-on reconstruction of the campaigns found in both the original Advance Wars and Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising, as well as online play in a Versus Mode for up to four players to see who the top wardog is.

First developed by Intelligent Systems, the lineage of Advance Wars goes all the way back to the days of Nintendo's original console in Japan, where it was called Famicom Wars. The first Advance Wars was deployed shortly after the U.S. rollout of the Game Boy Advance in 2001, but would soon find its popularity surprisingly eclipsed by the lords and ladies of the Fire Emblem series, which has since taken point in the developer's battle plan.

Similar to its Smash-tacular sibling series, Advance Wars features turn-based combat as you engage with enemy forces across various terrain and weather conditions, gaining ground in the name of keeping the peace. Over land and sea and air, Advance Wars is once again there! — **DAVID**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: WAYFORWARD
RELEASE: DECEMBER 3, 2021
RATING: RP

SUPER MONKEY BALL: BANANA MANIA

Roll back in time with hundreds of classic courses!

IN 2019, Sega released Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz HD to the Nintendo Switch (among other platforms). This led to some confusion, as the Wii installment of the series was not among the most favored by Monkey Ball fans.

RGG Studios' Masao Shirosaki, who directed and produced the remake, explained to CrunchyRoll that while he understood that the earlier games had a larger fanbase, the limited time and budget available to them made the more recent Wii title the most reasonable option. However, he added that if there was enough support for Banana Blitz HD, it could pave the way for remaking the first two games.

There was enough support.

Sega is calling Super Monkey Ball: Banana Mania "the ultimate Super Monkey Ball experience," as it contains more than 300 levels from fan-favorite installments Super Monkey Ball, Super Monkey Ball 2 and Super Monkey Ball Deluxe. Throw in a dozen mini-games such as Monkey Racing, Monkey Soccer, Monkey Bowling and Monkey Baseball, and that's enough to make any Monkey Ball fan go bananas!

Other features include online leaderboards and co-op for up to four players, plus a Story Mode which is set to feature comic book-styled storytelling. On top of all that, you can customize your character and ball to your liking.

The original Monkey Ball hit arcades on June 23, 2001, and while Banana Mania won't arrive until this Fall, it will still be timely enough to celebrate two decades of fun with the coolest monkeys this side of Donkey Kong Country. Incidentally, Shirosaki also said a new game could be in the cards . . . maybe if this does well? — **DAVID**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SEGA RELEASE: OCTOBER 5, 2021 RATING: E10+

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD 2

Return to the sky in the saga's next sequel!

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: TBA 2022 RATING: RP

SPLATOON 3, Metroid Prime 4, Bayonetta 3 . . . these are just a few of the games that fans might have expected to see in Nintendo's E3 2021 Direct. Instead we got WarioWare, Metroid Dread and Advance Wars! Those Switch-exclusive switcheroos were largely well-received, but there was one game that Nintendo knew was required of the show: The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild 2. In the end, they made good on that expectation – but not in the ways that most fans expected!

First off, we still don't know what the real name of this new game will be. Nintendo is worried that the title alone will be too much of a spoiler. Instead, they want us to speculate, and we're happy to oblige them!

Combining the information we saw in BOTW2's debut trailer from 2019 with this new one paints an intriguing, but far from complete picture. In the original trailer, we saw Link and Zelda together, exploring a cave, then witnessing the resurrection of some sort of skeletal monster. This is still likely Ganondorf coming back for another attack, but the new trailer gave us no extra hints regarding the ghoul's true identity. Instead, it picks up in a dark place filled with red, flailing tendrils, like a poisonous sea anemone. Link's right arm is corrupted with this energy . . . which is maybe the same energy that brought that corpse back to life? Then Link and Zelda are separated before we see Link falling in the sky! Surrounded by floating islands! And he's wearing green again? Wait a minute, is this Breath of the Wild 2 or Skyward Sword 2? Could it be both?!

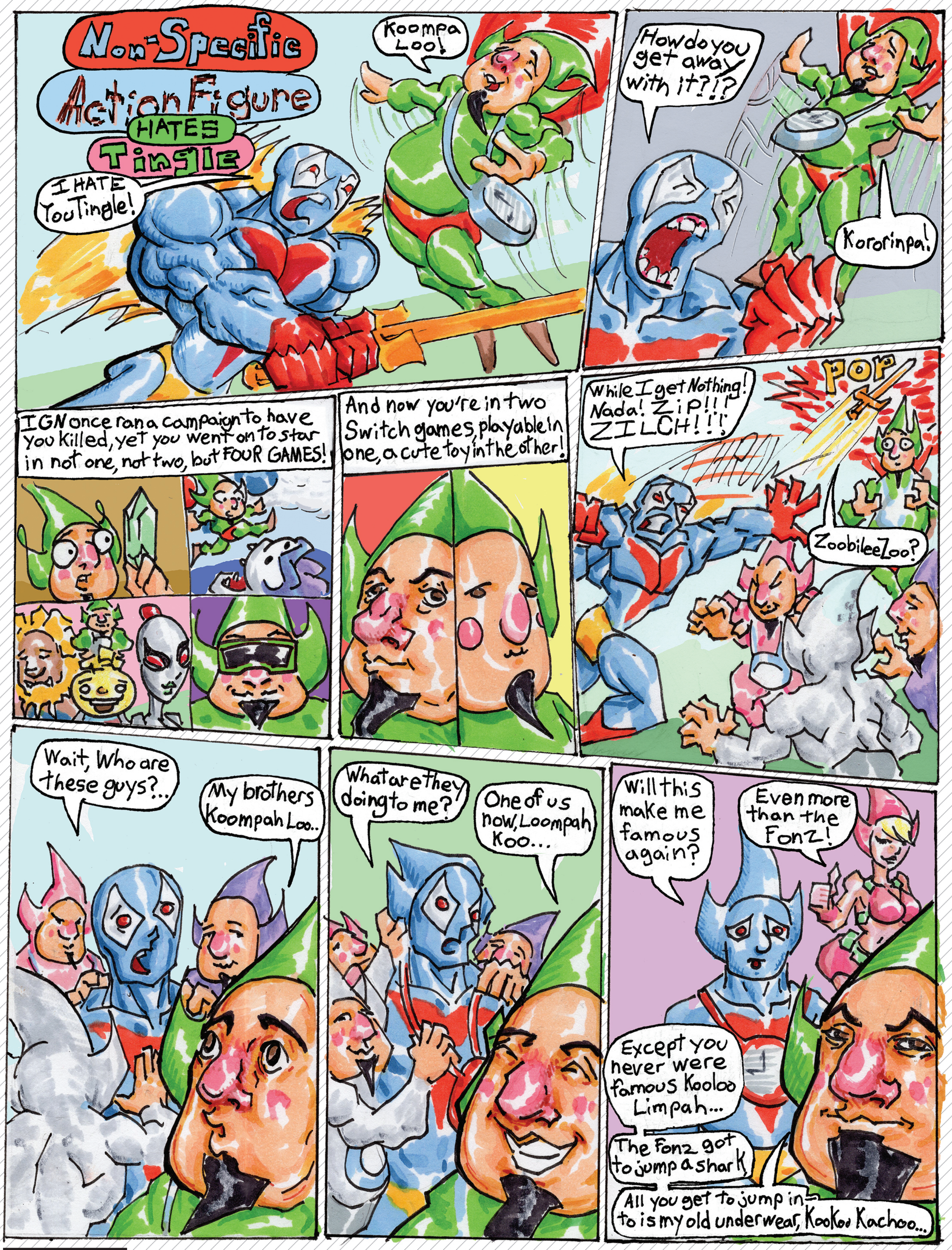
Then in a flash, Link is back on solid ground, using his new arm to send a giant spiked ball back at a group of Moblins, then passing through solid walls! There's pre-production art for the first Breath of the Wild that shows Link with an infected arm that can physically transform into different weapons, so it's likely that this idea has been sitting in the development team's minds for a while. We also see Link using some sort of flamethrower at one point! Talk about setting expectations on fire . . .

We also know the team has been considering the idea of making Zelda playable for a long time, and it could be that with BOTW2, they're finally going for it. This new trailer features two distinctly different default designs for Link: one in the refined, regal blue tunic from the previous game, and the other, more savage-looking, with longer hair and more exposed skin.

Are these the same people, or will one of these Links be swapped out for Zelda or Ganondorf in the final game? Or could it be that there will be two different playable Links, like in Ocarina of Time? Perhaps it's a time jump we're seeing, with the longer hair indicating Link is inactive for a while after the events in the cave. (He did sleep for 100 years before Breath of the Wild began, after all.)

It may sound impossible, but with 35 years of history behind it, the Zelda series has done it all before in one form or another.

But it looks like BOTW2 will do its best to upset the natural order of things and surprise us. The dead live, water droplets flow backward in time and fall upward into the sky, and castles float above our heads. Let's just hope that nothing upsets the game's development process and it makes its rather generous "sometime in 2022" launch date. We already can't wait! **– JONATHAN**



BY JONATHAN HOLMES

ASK IWATA

We've read the official English translation of Hobonichi's Mr. Iwata tribute book, and we've taken in the words of wisdom within. Now, let's discuss our thoughts!

TONY: Before we kick off, I just want to ask, "Are you happy doing what you're doing?"

KRIS: I'm happy doing what I'm doing!

JOHN-CHARLES: I think I'm happy doing what I'm doing.

REBECCA: That depends?

BRETT: Happy and frustrated at the same time!

TONY: Iwata's go-to icebreaker at the start of every one of his staff interviews would be to ask them if they're happy. That's basically the theme of the book: to spread happiness and ensure that the customers he serves and the people working under him feel fulfilled.

KRIS: Yeah, one of the most striking things I found about the book was just how astonishingly refreshing his philosophy was. You hear all these stories about other game company CEOs and the astonishing amounts of greed that exist in the world, and then you get somebody so genuinely kind as Iwata running his whole show. He got to be where he was and never let anything get to his head. He was just an extraordinarily humble and fascinating man.

REBECCA: I really liked to see that he took the time to talk to all of his employees twice a year, even at the beginning of HAL, and he kept it up when he became a programmer at Nintendo and had over 200 people working under him. Just the fact that he was able to check in with them, ask them how they're feeling, if what they're doing makes them happy – that's something I think a lot of companies would really benefit from doing. I mean, where I am right now, we have our quarterly performance evaluations and they give me an opportunity to express ideas that I have, and I really appreciate that.

JOHN-CHARLES: There are so many great tidbits about the choices he made at every stage of his career that were so different from what other companies were doing, and every time it came back to getting to know the person who was there. Like, the one that stuck out to me most was when he said that so many interviewers love to put their interviewees' feet to the coals to see if someone under pressure will give you an honest answer. Iwata instead wanted to make sure they're comfortable and enthusiastic, to learn if this is a person you'll want to work with or not. And that was just so enlightening, seeing every decision he made and how it always came back to "Is this person happy? How can I get to know this person better?"

TONY: What fascinated me most was that he never sat on his laurels. Even when Nintendo was at their best, he always questioned if what they were doing was the right thing. He wanted to challenge the status quo, even when doing so would have made customers or his own staff unhappy. At the same time, he always made a point of saying not to effect change from a spirit of rejection, but from a desire to adapt alongside changes in the greater marketplace.

REBECCA: What really affected me was how humble he was, like how he said that if there was anybody who could ever be a better president than him, then by all means, let them have the position.

BRETT: I wonder what he was like during the Wii U years, as the book covers a lot of the Wii and Nintendo DS years when things were highly successful. I remember a press conference where he bowed to his shareholders because he was so upset about how things were going. It's a bummer that the book kind of only covered one era, especially because he talked very little about his family life or time for himself. It seemed like his whole life was dedicated to others.

KRIS: Back to the Wii U, it's really interesting to look at that system now after having read this book, because you can really see all the the love and care that was put into making it a proper console. It didn't succeed the way that anyone wanted it to, obviously, but looking back on it now, all of the attention to detail, all the little things that the Wii U got right – just understanding the philosophy behind its design really put that system into an interesting perspective. As time goes on, consoles like that become more and more fascinating to me.

On a similar point, it's such a shame that he went through everything he went through, with the whole cutting of his salary and all the shame about the failures of the Wii U, that he didn't get to experience the overwhelming success of the Switch. By the end of the book, they're talking about the end of his life, which was really, really touching, yet the thought that kept coming into my mind was: Man, he had it! He was right there, and success was right around the corner! It's such a tragedy that he didn't get to be here for the resounding success of the Switch.

JOHN-CHARLES: There's not a lot of Wii U in this book because so much of it was assembled from the Iwata Asks pieces he would do throughout the Wii and DS lifespans, which slowly faded out during the Wii U era. But it's interesting how you can kind of piece together the last two years of his career from them. He talks a lot about the relationship between families and who monopolized the television, and you see a lot of the ideas that would become the Wii U GamePad or the way the Switch works as its own screen. And on top of that, the level of responsibility that Iwata felt to Nintendo, not just as a president but also very personally – it's sort of like Nintendo was his family.

KRIS: Speaking of family, you hear all the stories about Hiroshi Yamauchi being this really shrewd and maniacal businessman. Yet the way Iwata spoke about him, it almost seemed like he was a pretty cool guy, which kind of caught me off guard.

TONY: It seems that, in everything, Iwata was just a genuinely passionate and inquisitive guy. There were so many little idiosyncrasies and personal anecdotes shared by friends throughout the book that highlighted the lighter parts of Iwata's life. For example, Miyamoto and Iwata never really argued, despite their frequent disagreements. One such difference was whether to dress professionally or more relaxed while in a work setting – Iwata preferred his suits because he always wanted to make an impression,

while Miyamoto would rather wear a T-shirt under a blazer, even during live appearances! Then there was Iwata's nickname, Kirby, earned because he would consume large piles of candy while attending meetings! Or how Iwata and Itoi would talk so long on train rides that Itoi would have to tell him, OK, I'm going to take a nap now, so please stop! Yeah, Iwata was just a running faucet that couldn't shut itself off!

REBECCA: Was anyone playing Splatoon around the time that Iwata passed away? Because that was right around the time of the first Splatfest, and I remember how every single surface was decorated with Miiverse posts that said, "Thank you, Mr. Iwata!" What an impact he had on people, that they would turn an otherwise solemn occasion into a celebration of life.

KRIS: There was a darn rainbow at his funeral! You couldn't have planned that better – not that you plan for something like that, obviously. There was something just incredibly magical about the guy.

BRETT: Those last few chapters were really rough. I think the saddest thing in the book was when Miyamoto said he couldn't go to Iwata in the office and tell him his big ideas anymore. They shared such an interesting relationship.

JOHN-CHARLES: Yeah, that part absolutely destroyed me. After I read it, I just kind of paused for a few minutes. You also got Itoi talking about being at Iwata's funeral and turning to Miyamoto to ask, "What do you think Iwata thought his odds were of getting better?" And he was like, he never thought he was going to die. He thought he'd find a way to beat this and be back to work the next day. And Itoi talked about kind of feeling embarrassed for asking that.

TONY: So how many of us actually broke into tears?

KRIS: I definitely welled up more than once.

BRETT: I had to take a hot minute a couple of times.

REBECCA: I read the book a couple of times in preparation for this discussion, and you just had to take a look back and say, yes, that was definitely a person I would have loved to work with.

KRIS: Absolutely. He seemed like just the most amazing boss in the world. It was funny reading it. I've been in a position to be a boss a couple of times, and a lot of the philosophies that he mentioned were things that I – not that I actually executed them anywhere near to the extent that he did – but always wanted to. He was the kind of boss I would want to be and the kind of boss I would want to work for.

Leading with kindness instead of just telling people what to do is such an extraordinarily rare thing, and I think it goes such a long way to explain Nintendo's output during that time. It was a very strange time with Iwata in charge, with the Wii and the Wii U and the 3DS, that they were all so filled with personality and uniqueness and really shook up what was going on in the industry. And it all connects so much to his management style, that the games that were being made were being made by people who were genuinely excited to make games.

TONY: Was there any particular lesson that really stuck with you or impacted your day-to-day life? The one that stuck out to me was when he was discussing logic applied to any kind of business plan and how machines don't make mistakes, programmers do. The takeaway is that, by default, you should always look within before you blame others, analyze the problem and see if you can come up with solutions to mitigate the problem or alleviate the issue entirely. For me in particular, I can be very closed-minded, and I have a habit of jumping on others for my own mistakes. I've got to try a little harder – as this book demonstrates clearly, taking the time to reflect does get results.

KRIS: Always lead with kindness. Kindness and curiosity: Those seemed to be the driving forces behind Iwata's interactions with other people in a business setting, in a personal setting, or whatever. I just think that's a really great mindset to be in.

JOHN-CHARLES: I've been in managerial positions before, and I found myself taking a lot of his managerial pointers to heart. I know what stuck with me was one of the final lines in the book where it's just one of his many words of wisdom, where he just says no prior bad experience has turned out to be a waste of time. I would honestly hand this book to anybody who's taking a leadership role.

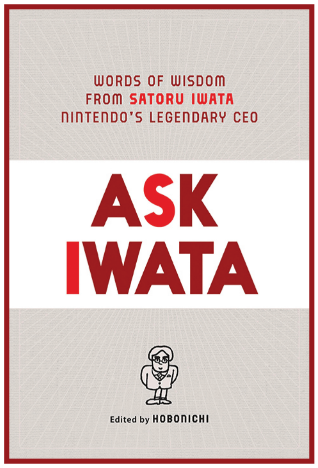
TONY: Final thoughts?

KRIS: I'm not generally much of a book reader, but this was a very easy read because not only was it not overly thick or anything, but it's structured very well. It's just so inspirational and really amazing to read a book about such an individual who was kind on every conceivable level. I can't possibly recommend this book enough, and I'm really glad that I had a chance to read it.

JOHN-CHARLES: I think this book belongs in the library of every programmer, every manager, every gamer and every designer. I think it's so easy to lose touch with humanity through your work, but he never once let that humanity get away from him. Even if he spent every minute of the day thinking and working, he always did come back to people. The world could be such a better place if so many more people in so many workplaces thought about their work and their employees and their peers the same way that Iwata did.

REBECCA: I really enjoyed reading through this. It gave me a little bit of insight into Iwata, who came across as very private. But still seeing the devotion to his family, albeit briefly, it really gave me another window into the kind of person he was. And while I don't really work in tech when I'm at my day job, I can still look at his management philosophy and understand how he reached out to others. And that's what I kind of like to do in my day-to-day life as well.

BRETT: While I don't really deal with a lot of management stuff because I'm a stay-at-home Dad – well, I guess maybe I do deal with a lot of management stuff – the takeaway I got was not how to run a business, but just how to be a person leading with kindness, like the way he sat down with people and made them feel like they were valued. I think that our society would be better if we did that with each other.



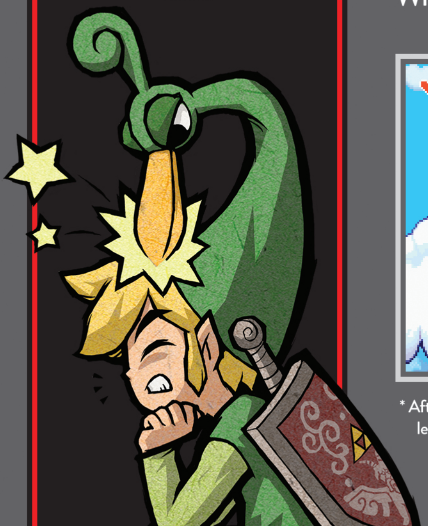
GRAB A COPY!

As the legendary LeVar Burton always said, you don't have to take our word for it! Pick up your own copy of Ask Iwata, read it for yourself and see what insights you can glean from its contents. The book is on sale in bookstores of both the online and brick-and-mortar varieties now, and its MSRP is $22.99 – but it's readily available much cheaper too!

BY JOHN-CHARLES HOLMES

LINK'S HEAD IN THE CLOUDS

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE MINISH CAP
GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2005



While Skyward Sword is certainly Link's most famous adventure to partially take place in the air up there, it isn't the only . . . or the first! One of his previous trips above the fixed footing of terra firma was in The Minish Cap, when he discovered beanstalks that led him into the clouds, Jack-style, dug through another set of floating fluffers with his Mole Mitts (proving their usefulness beyond just slinging dirt) and ultimately journeyed through the Palace of Winds and did battle with a pair of enormous, flying, manta ray-esque Gyorgs! **— LUCAS**

* After this adventure, Link decided riding on a bird would be better than letting a bird ride on him. ** Yes, I know it's actually a different Link.

35 YEARS LATER THE HITS OF '86

Has any other single year produced as many major franchises as this?

THE CELEBRATION OF The Legend of Zelda's 35th anniversary is officially under way. It got a bit of a late start – Nintendo had to wrap up their festivities surrounding the Super Mario series' 35th first – but starting with Skyward Sword HD, it's all Zelda, baby!

. . . Though, it shouldn't be!

By all means, please sing the praises of Link and Zelda and the Hungry Goriya through the end of 2021 and beyond – but don't forget the four other famous franchises that are each marking the same milestone this year as well. Zelda was born in 1986, and so were Dragon Quest, Metroid, Castlevania and Kid Icarus!

Let's honor each of these big-name brands individually, shall we, taking a moment to reflect on the lasting impact of the first release in each series.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

Zelda is up first, not because it's the biggest name of the bunch (that's arguable), but because it was the first to make it to market, beginning on February 21, 1986. In Japan, that is. We often think back to these games' American debut dates when marking anniversary moments, but we're going by Japan's dates here, because what a wild single year '86 was for them!

We had to wait until August 1987 for the Legend to begin in English, so Japan's fans had a year-and-a-half head start on venturing out into the wilds of the first Hyrule. And that's exactly what the first Zelda game offered: go-anywhere exploration of a vast, interconnected overworld on a scale never seen before! Its freedom was liberating, and eye-opening. Players could guide Link just about anywhere they wanted from the very first moments of the quest: meandering leisurely from screen to screen, or making a beeline straight to the first dungeon (if they knew where to find it) or getting lost in the first Lost Woods. The sense of discovery was a joy!

And that was just half of the story! Zelda 1 also presented the series' trailblazing first underground labyrinths, laying the foundation for decades' worth of puzzle-packed dungeons to follow. It brought us Link's first assortment of items and weapons. It introduced us to Ganon, a disappearing pig beast who couldn't be defeated without just the right arrow!

All these years later, the original Legend of Zelda is still inspiring new sequels. It was a masterpiece!

. . . But again, it wasn't alone.

RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 21, 1986

RELEASE DATE: MAY 27, 1986

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 6, 1986

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 26, 1986

RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 19, 1986

DRAGON QUEST

Put yourself in the shoes of a young Famicom owner in Japan in early 1986. You've just experienced The Legend of Zelda in all its grandeur, and you can't imagine ever playing anything else nearly as epic as that ever again. And then Enix drops Dragon Quest!

The game we in the States didn't get until August 1989 (as "Dragon Warrior") made its original debut in Japan just three months after Zelda 1. And its sprawling land of Alefgard instantly rivaled Nintendo's huge Hyrule!

Similarly, it was a go-anywhere world from the start, letting players explore at their own pace. Unsimilarly, it was full of random encounters that triggered turn-based battles against increasingly difficult enemies! So while the world was open from the start, you couldn't reasonably see all it had to offer until you built up your hero's experience levels and equipped him with better weapons and armor. It demanded much more patience of its players – but that approach paid off! Dragon Quest has soared with regular sequels ever since, and remains especially beloved in Japan.

METROID

Players had the summer months of June and July to conquer all of Alefgard, but as the calendar flipped into August, an entirely opposite adventure met them next. What's the opposite of a slow-paced, fantasy-themed RPG? A sci-fi action spectacle that pushes you to clear its quest as quickly as you can!

The original Metroid pushed sidescrolling action gaming forward just as forcefully as Zelda had propelled top-down action adventures and Dragon Quest had set a new baseline for console role-playing. It, again, innovated by presenting a freely explorable, interconnected world. But in Metroid, reaching every corner of the map demanded first finding upgrades to hero Samus Aran's armaments. Missiles were required to open red doors. Bombs were needed to blast holes in certain floors and walls. Tight spaces could be rolled through in Morph Ball form, but you first had to grab the Morph Ball item to activate that ability.

There was some shared DNA happening here. Like some places in Hyrule being unreachable until Link found items like the Ladder and the Raft, Samus got to enjoy more freedom over time after claiming her various items. And some chambers in Planet Zebes, while technically reachable from the start, were full of intimidating, high damage-dealing foes meant to deflect players from entering until later – just like Dragon Quest springing high-leveled enemies on any heroes who ventured too far too fast. Collectively, 1986 was evolving game design as a whole.

CASTLEVANIA

But the year wasn't done yet! Konami leapt into the fray with the first installment in the legendary Castlevania saga just one month later. 35 years into the future, Metroid and Castlevania have become so intertwined that "Metroidvania" is now its own genre name. How fitting that they debuted so close to one another back in '86!

The original Castlevania doesn't have a ton in common with its most modern sequels any more, as its one-level-at-a-time structure has long since been left in the past. The push toward interconnected map exploration that immediately preceded it ended up catching Konami's eye too! But Castlevania 1 is still praiseworthy to this day for being so rich in gorgeous gothic imagery, setting a standard for sensational soundtracks and kicking off the still-ongoing story of an endlessly reincarnated Count Dracula and the generational legacy of the Belmont family of vampire hunters always called upon to put him back in his grave. It was an inspired experience, and once again, Japan's Famicom fans were being spoiled rotten!

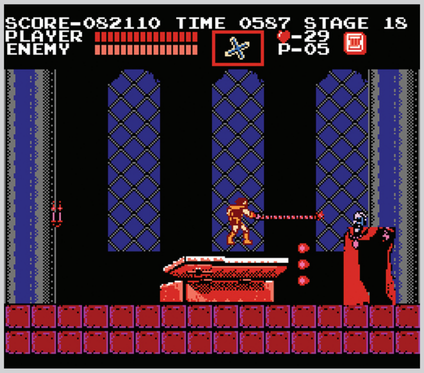
KID ICARUS

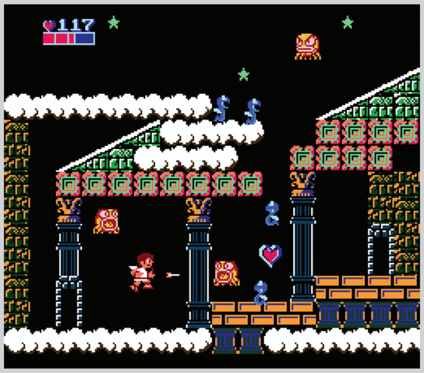
Finally, as 1986 was coming to a close, one more iconic brand began in December. Now, granted, the Kid Icarus franchise isn't a large one – after its 8-bit debut it only got one follow-up game on the Game Boy before going on hiatus all the way until the 3DS era's series revival, Kid Icarus: Uprising. Still, the character of Pit has overcome the lacking quantity of his appearances with the undeniable quality of each game he does show up in.

His first game being no exception! Kid Icarus was as boundary-pushing of a game design as any of its four contemporaries here, I'd argue, in that it was four different games in one! It had the vertically scrolling stages most people remember – but it also had sidescrolling levels in its second world. Every fourth stage was a freely explorable interconnected dungeon (keeping that evolution moving forward), and finally the whole thing finished with a forced-scrolling shooter sequence! It was an adventure of true variety, and one that must have felt like the perfect last course in the five-course meal that had been 1986 for Japan's lucky players.

TRAVELING BACK IN TIME

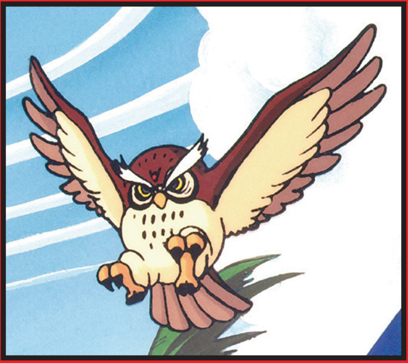
As always, I recommend that you "Play It Today" in any way you can! The Legend of Zelda, Metroid and Kid Icarus are all available through Nintendo Switch Online, and Castlevania is on Switch through its Anniversary Collection. A version of Dragon Quest is in the eShop, too! Seek each of them out and appreciate how good 1986 was for gaming! **— LUCAS**





CHARACTER PROFILE
KAEPORA GAEBORA

Mr. Owl, how many A presses does it take for you to let Link stop speaking to you? As we look once again to the sky, we remember Hyrule's original iconic bird!



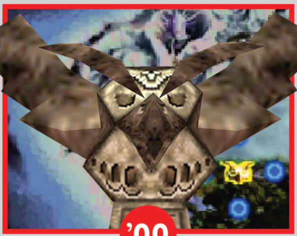
FIRST APPEARANCE?
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: LINK'S AWAKENING **(GAME BOY, 1993)**

CAREER HIGHS

The "real" Kaepora Gaebora then made his grand entrance on the N64, and served the same purpose: telling Link where he should go next.

'98

Gaebora then taught Link the Song of Soaring, allowing him to fast-travel to 10 different Owl Statues spread across the land of Termina.



'00

He even secured a spot in the series' spin-offs! Here, he tutorialized four Links on how to act like a cohesive team in Four Swords Adventures.

'04

Just like the Legend of Zelda series has a whole series of different Zeldas, and different Links, and different Impas and Beedles and on and on, Kaepora Gaebora has appeared by that name on occasion, and other times has inspired look-alikes.

'21

Next to be seen on the Switch will be this guy: Headmaster Gaepora! Some fans will vehemently argue that he's another unrelated character, but come on. Who are we kidding? It's the same old owl again, just as a man!

CAREER LOWS

'93

Link was first guided by an enigmatic owl on the Game Boy . . . but it was just a dream, and not the same owl later seen on the big screen!

'05

After that appearance, though, he got bounced out of the spotlight by a different too-talkative bird pal. The utter indignity of it all!

'19

Gaebora made his Switch debut! Well, kind of. Again, the Link's Awakening owl sort of is the same character and sort of isn't.

HIGHLIGHTS

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME
N64, 1998

Kaepora Gaebora gained an immortal reputation in his first official appearance in Ocarina of Time by giving speeches that were so long-winded that many players began to mash buttons to speed through the text . . . and then they'd accidentally select "No" when he asked "Did you get all that?", causing him to start all over again!

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK 3D
3DS, 2015

Gaebora's reputation got some rehabilitation thanks to his activation of the fast-travel Owl Statues mentioned above, but Western players got extra functionality in the fact that those same statues also served as save points in the localized release. The 3DS remake went further, though, adding Quill Statues for even easier saves!

WHO? WHO?
IDENTITY CRISIS

As if the Link's Awakening owl and Skyward Sword's Gaepora weren't confusing things enough, the Hyrule Historia reference book made the claim that Kaepora Gaebora isn't his own being at all, but rather an astral projection of the spirit of Rauru, the Light Sage. So is this bird one character, or four, or what? It's enough to make your head spin!

BY LUCAS M. THOMAS

"Go straight this way and you will see Hyrule Castle. You will meet a princess there . . . If you are lost and don't know which way to go, look at the Map. The areas you have explored will be shown on the Map. Press START to enter the Subscreens and Z or R to find the Map. On the Map Subscreen, you will also see a flashing dot showing you which way to go next. Did you get all that?"

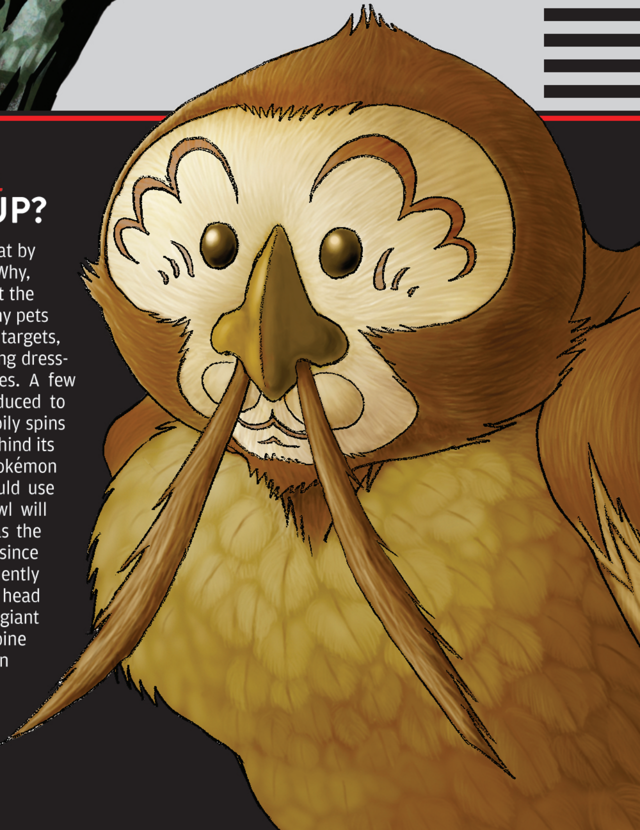
"Go straight this way and you will see Hyrule Castle. You will meet a princess there . . . If you are lost and don't know which way to go, look at the Map. The areas you have explored will be shown on the Map. Press START to enter the Subscreens and Z or R to find the Map. On the Map Subscreen, you will also see a flashing dot showing you which way to go next. Did you get all that?"

- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

HEAD ON A SWIVEL

WHICH SIDE UP?

Owls are odd – everyone knows that by now. Nintendo fans in particular! Why, just a couple of months ago we met the Cohoots of Monster Hunter Rise: tiny pets who usefully track down hunting targets, but spend more of their time playing dress-up in a variety of cutesy costumes. A few years before that, we were introduced to the face-twisting Rowlet, who happily spins its whole head around to glance behind its body and double-check with its Pokémon Trainer about which attack it should use next. But no other video game owl will ever be as much of an odd bird as the Zelda series' Kaepora Gaebora, since this feathered freak of nature frequently greets the Hero of Time with his head turned entirely upside down! His giant eyebrows and menacing beak combine to look like a nose with huge hairs in desperate need of a trim – it's a truly horrifying sight to behold. "Can I get a different tutorial creature over here, please?"



WARP ZONE

What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

AS WE BARRELED toward the release of the Nintendo 64, the cover of Issue #86 of Nintendo Power gave us a tantalizing peek at what was to come. The system had already launched in Japan by this point, but thanks to the 3+ month delay, the NP crew was able to give a little shine to titles that might not have otherwise gotten a chance in the spotlight, all while still hyping the next generation.

For instance, in 1996, Iron Man was not the Hollywood megastar he is today – so getting his co-starring role alongside Valiant Comics' X-O Manowar featured so prominently within these pages would have been anything but a sure thing. Previews also brought some added attention to the unreleased Dragon Hopper for Virtual Boy, Tetris Attack, Waterworld for Game Boy and the surprise late-gen SNES hit Kirby Super Star.

E3 was a large focus, of course, showing off a bit more Super Mario 64 and revealing a list of 17 titles that were coming to the former Project Reality, more than half of which would be published by Nintendo themselves! What's more, the list didn't include games that would be coming from Japanese third-party developers, either.

A fall lineup of Super NES games was also shown off, including Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie's Double Trouble!, Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3, Kirby Super Star, Power Rangers Zeo: Battle Racers, Marvel Super Heroes in War of the Gems and . . . Ms. Pac-Man? On the portable side of things, Nintendo introduced the Game Boy Pocket and announced a price cut for the Virtual Boy, bringing its price down to $99.95, with similar drops for its software.

Seven pages were dedicated to Pilotwings 64, including a look behind the scenes at Paradigm Simulation Inc. And for an interesting curio, the other side of the Super Mario RPG strategy fold-out was a poster for Robotech: Crystal Dreams – an impressive-looking N64 title that also headlined Pak Watch, but would never see release.

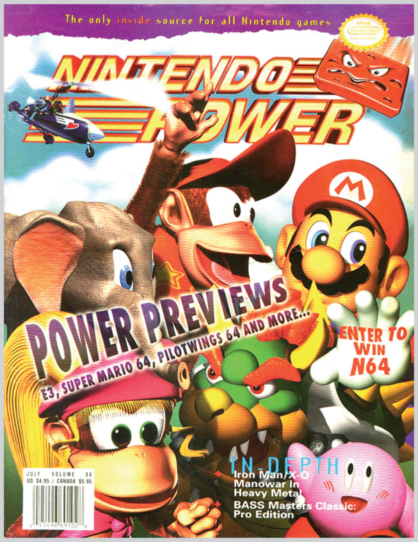
Finally, Player's Poll winners this month would score big with their very own Nintendo 64, complete with all six controller colors, a library of games and a 35" television, all surrounded by the most '90s copy seen this side of an Image comic.

On the subject of spotlights granted by the N64's delay, that seems the most likely explanation for Tetris Attack earning the cover of NP #87. Much of this issue followed on stuff previewed last issue, but with some extra coverage of upcoming titles such as Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey for the Nintendo 64, part of the short-lived "Nintendo Sports" label.

The Virtual Boy got another spotlight for an unreleased game in Zero Racers, Donkey Kong Land 2 got a Game Boy preview and so did one of Shigeru Miyamoto's lesser-known works, Mole Mania. Ten pages were dedicated to previewing Super Mario 64 (it's hard to appreciate now how immensely *huge* hype was for this game was at the time), three of which shared poster space with fellow launch title Pilotwings 64. And keeping up with the subject of the N64, four pages were dedicated to the system's launch in Japan a couple of months prior.

Finally, this month's Player's Poll winner would receive a trip for four to one of the landmarks featured in Pilotwings 64 (including Mount Rushmore, Cape Canaveral and Washington, D.C.) plus a copy of the game. You know, it's strange how for, as much as this game was pushed at the time, we've never seen a re-release since! **– DAVID**

ISSUE #86: **JULY 1996**



ISSUE #87: **AUGUST 1996**

An innovative strategy series from Japan gets even better.

FIRE EMBLEM

In 1990, Nintendo Co. Ltd. took a chance on an unusual game. Designed by Nintendo and Intelligent Systems, it combined strategy and RPG features in a unique, sprawling epic. Fire Emblem became a cult classic, spawning three sequels to date. Now, Epic Center takes you a world away to explore this fantasy realm for the Super Famicom.

© 1996 Nintendo

EPIC EXTRA

FIRE EMBLEM RISES FROM THE PAKS

The Japanese video game market is like a vast forest of RPGs, with literally dozens of new Super Famicon titles sprouting up every year. It's a miracle that any game stands out at all, but that's exactly what Fire Emblem has achieved in four reincarnations. Like Dragon Quest and Final Fantasy, Fire Emblem has beaten the odds. The series began quietly with Fire Emblem: The Lightning Sword and the Dark Dragon. This game introduces the hero, Marus, who confronts a powerful dragon named Medious. The game's unique approach is to break up the traditional RPG party into individual characters. Players control Marus and his followers, including knights, magic users, fighters and other characters. Individual characters move independently on an overworld map where strategic placement is the key to success. Characters also have their own stories, which often cross and intertwine with the tales of other characters. The mix of strategy and in-depth storytelling makes for an intriguing blend, something like a mix of Final Fantasy III and Ogre Battle.

The second Fire Emblem follows the exploits of Marus after the fall of Medious. The land seems to be getting back to normal when Emperor Hardaine suddenly calls for help. Marus grows suspicious, but sets out on an expedition.

Some of the heroes and villains of Fire Emblem have been equipped with weapons from the gods. Other weapons can be purchased in towns and weapons worn down in battle can be repaired.

The third F.E., Secret of the Crest, released in 1993, was a remake of the first two Fire Emblems, but with new battle scenarios. The fourth game begins a new chapter in the history of Fire Emblem.

56 NINTENDO POWER

VOLUME 87 57

FIRE EMBLEM'S EARLY INTRODUCTION

The Fire Emblem series began in 1990, but wouldn't make its way to North America until 2003 with the seventh entry in the saga, The Blazing Blade (simply titled "Fire Emblem" over here). But somewhere in the middle, before Super Smash Bros. Melee fans the world over began crying out for more about these "Marth" and "Roy" guys, Nintendo Power featured the series in four pages of Issue #87's Epic Center. While it briefly covered previous games, the primary focus was on the series' fourth and latest release for the Super Famicom, and would end with nine of the worst words in the English language: "There are no plans for a North American release."

DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH
November 21, 1985 in Antwerp, Belgium

FAVORITE FOOD
Thai Green Curry

LITTLE-KNOWN FACT
I remodeled, opened and ran a bar for a year, until we got bullied out by the mob.

CURRENT POSITION IN THE INDUSTRY
Member of the "Joon, Pol, Muuutsch, Char & Torfi" team

BEST KNOWN FOR
NUTS, Don't Trip, LAZA KNITEZ!!

JONATAN "JOON" VAN HOVE

The director of NUTS (and pioneer of the new squirrel surveillance genre) offers us his game development insights!

INTERVIEW BY **JONATHAN HOLMES**

WITH A COUPLE OF QUESTIONS FIELDED BY NUTS ART DIRECTOR **POL CLARISSOU**

NF: First up, how did you get started in game development?

JOON: I got a programming degree in 2007 and did one internship, but I couldn't stomach small office politics, so I became a guy with a van who did all sorts of stuff and eventually got into bartending. After a few years it felt like I was treading water a bit, and I started looking into higher education – in 2011 I started a master's degree in Game Design and Development at ITU Copenhagen, thinking that if I'm lucky I might be able to apply for jobs at big studios because that's all there is, right? I immediately rolled into the thriving European indie scene, and having some event facilitation experience, elbowed (and privileged) my way into all sorts of places. With a few fellow students, our first game LAZA KNITEZ!! became an OUYA exclusive, and suddenly we needed to pay taxes somehow, so we started a company which became Glitchnap. We made some games for Adult Swim and applied for some grants, and that all lasted until 2018 when we split up amicably and I went on to do Don't Trip and then NUTS.

In all my 42 years of gaming, I've never played anything quite like NUTS. Were there any games you played growing up that influenced you to want to make a game about . . . squirrel surveillance?!?

JOON: I mostly played mainstream games growing up, not really thinking about them critically. But in the Copenhagen indie scene, there was a lot of experimentation going on. One time I ended up at a house party where someone had rigged a webcam to convert facial expressions as keyboard inputs and was playing Mario with it. In the other room people were playing Johann Sebastian Joust (a motion-controlled indie game for the PlayStation Move controller), but the timing effect was rigged up to a home trainer. In yet another room people were discussing how to use a trampoline as a game input (which they later did). My master's degree was also quite artistic and philosophical focused rather than practical, so ever since I started making stuff, I was around people trying to innovate on games. In one of my experiments I ended up with a camera and a CRT TV showing the camera feed. That was pretty compelling, but then I needed something to look at, preferably something that moved . . .

Using photography as the primary mechanic in a game can be a tough sell, though it involves so many of the things people love about games: exploring, strategy, timing, aiming and even shooting! How have you worked to explain your game to people and help them to understand why it's fun?

JOON: Even though you do print out photos, I consider the main mechanic to be videography and not photography. Since the squirrels are not there when you're exploring, placing cameras and aiming them, it makes the part where you review the footage really exciting. You get a little dopamine hit when the squirrel pops up on the screen, even though in that moment you're usually not touching any buttons or interacting at all. You're just . . . waiting. This was indeed a tough sell! "Hey kids, do you love waiting???" But luckily we had a demo really early, and some people made very flattering videos of it that explained why it was compelling way better than I ever could.

Joon, you helped found "The House of Indie," an indie game community in Belgium that endured from 2014 to 2018, a time that many consider to be the later part of the "gold rush" era of indie game development. How do you think the market has changed for indies since 2018?

JOON: My feeling is that in that era we were celebrating the tools and marketplaces being democratized, in the way that this happened with affordable equipment in other artistic and commercial media (photo, film, music), and that around that time a lot of universities, educational programs, incubators, etc. were kicking into gear, leading to the high level of saturation we see now.

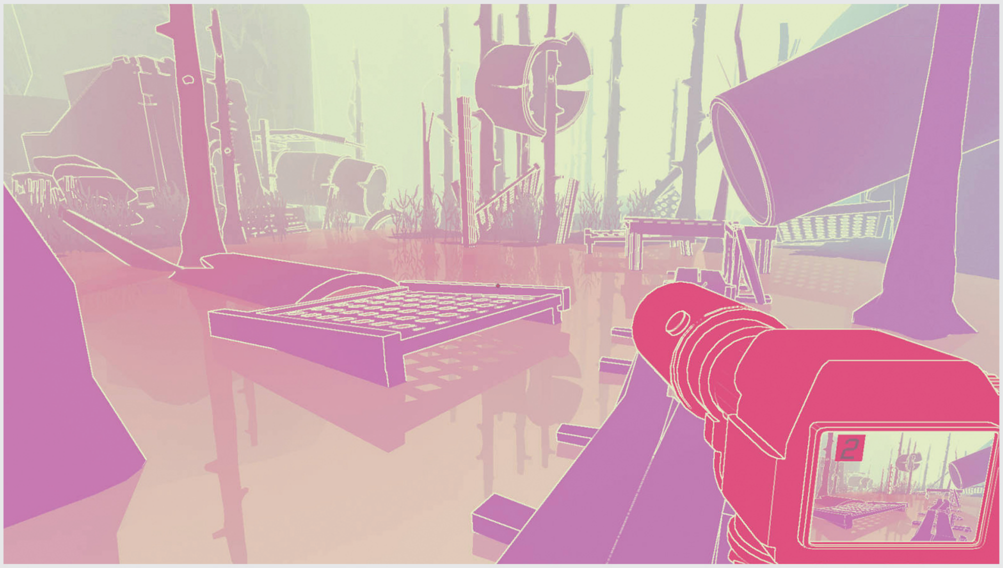
I think before 2018, you could more often predict which games would do well, based on simple factors like originality and quality. Then the amount of games released increased so rapidly that the whole landscape kind of changed. Investing your own money into a multi-year project became a really bad idea because of the volatility, and instead all these small and mid-sized publishers came along.

And where we are today, I see people talk about whether their game will appeal to publishers more than whether it'll appeal to players. On one hand, we have a lot more money flying around; on the other hand, the returns, even for a game that "does well," are often lower. After 2018 it also became much harder to say anything conclusively about the industry, so I'll leave it here.

Pol, you've been successful in both the fine art and video game art worlds. What are some of the similarities and differences between creating for those two audiences?

POL: I wouldn't say I've been deeply involved in the fine arts world – I've only anecdotally interacted with it! It is interesting, though, to see how both worlds look at each other with relative envy but don't actually interact meaningfully – the art world seems to understand games in kind of a superficial way, and the games world doesn't really take the art world seriously either. I'd say creating for these audiences is different in that they speak a very different language in the end: Both video games and the art world have very specific kinds of literacy and tropes that are completely inscrutable to the other camp.

I'm excited to see more bridges between artists in those two fields. I think really interesting works come out of it! However, it's also important to remember that at the higher level both the games industry and the art world are moneymaking and whitewashing schemes for a class of rich investors and moguls – we as working artists have a lot in common, and we should bond on that basis rather than focusing on identities around "industries."



Joon, you worked on a game based on We Bare Bears, a cartoon series which, like NUTS, is about forest animals with robust, hidden lives. What is it about the idea of beasts who secretly do some of the same things that people do that's so fascinating?

JOON: "Free Fur All," which was commissioned by Cartoon Network, was kind of like our first big game! I can't believe you even remember it exists – 2015 was like 42 years ago in games industry years. That game is hard to find nowadays I think, but all of the minigames came from that experimentation phase I spoke about earlier. It was a mobile game, where you'd flick your phone to flip pancakes, or tilt it forward to steer a segway. One of the most exciting things about that project was that we got to see episodes of the show before they were finished. Barely animated black-and-

"BREAKING THE GAME"

Want to hear more from Joon? Check out his TED Talk on YouTube! Recorded at TEDxReykjavík in 2017, Joon's presentation was entitled "Breaking the Game" and focused on stories of players breaking free from the norms of how games are *supposed* to be played, with several examples of incredible video game performance art. His observations of divergent player behavior certainly influenced his work on NUTS!

white animatics with placeholder voice-over. I've always been drawn to forests, or the outdoors, both in real life and in video games. And inevitably when I'm in a forest, I'll see some kind of creature and point at it and say, "What's he up to?"

Pol, you've worked on a lot of games that are like dreams. What are the main similarities and differences between a good game and a good dream?

POL: I don't know how other people's dreams are, but I know mine are always very shifting – there is no permanence, only snapshots, and the entire scene might change from a moment to the next while one object remains the point of focus. This is the kind of surrealism I try to evoke in some of my games! Games allow us to play with the physicality of space and represent it in ways that are a lot more malleable than pure reproduction.

I also generally always try to challenge assumptions about what things look and feel like, in a way that's inspired by this kind of logic. To take NUTS as an example: a forest can be vibrant pink! A blanket color can wash over a scene to give it a particular mood, and our brains are really good at interpreting things even if they stray off from realism and literalism.

What's it been like developing for the Switch?

JOON: Oh it was great!

No, actually it was tough.

Ehhh . . . I'm going to be honest, and we worked with some excellent people to help us with the most difficult parts. The people at Plastic Fern did a great job porting the game and dealing with our poorly optimized 3D world. But I love the Switch, personally, and am so happy that our game is on there. The main gameplay of placing cameras and watching their feeds is something I hope people will play on the couch with friends or family. I get emails asking me if it is "kid-friendly," and they're always from people who are playing on Switch. For the record: It is totally kid-friendly (no jump scares, no gore, no violence), but Nina does say a curse word once, about 30 minutes in. We got into some big trouble due to our age rating. That's what you get making a game that's not in your first language I guess – we forgot to "localize" it for America.

NUTS is the kind of game that people are afraid to spoil. What are your thoughts on game spoilers? Do you think a game that's fun to play should be enjoyable even if you know parts of the story beforehand, or do you think that keeping game narrative twists a secret is important more often than not?

JOON: I'm personally not super affected by spoilers, especially in games, since experiencing it yourself will always leave some sort of impact. We had a lot of discussion about whether to spoil anything, and what, in our trailer, and decided that it was worth it to make sure people understand what the game is. A good story, or a good game, are good even on a second or third playthrough, and relying on twists is just one of many ways of storytelling, so I'm not too bothered by it. I was much more worried about the fact that the squirrels' paths were pre-determined and could be spoiled by watching videos, since it would make the gameplay loop skippable. I spent a lot of time trying to make a squirrel A.I. but ultimately found it outside of scope for now.

Can you give us any hints about what your next project might be? An even bigger and more ambitious concept? NUTS 2: Even Nuttier!?

JOON: Honestly? I have no idea. NUTS is the first game I made that actually allows me to take a step back without frantically having to find my next gig. For the first eight years of my career I was usually working on at least two projects at a time. Always planning ahead. But now, I don't know. I never thought I could get into narrative in games, before NUTS. My last games were always very mechanics-focused. But I really love what NUTS became, and the way the team was made and worked together, so whatever I do next will be heavily influenced by who I do it with. Definitely not something bigger or more ambitious – if anything I'd like to do something smaller. Who knows, maybe I'll release something else this year. The current active volcano (Fagradalsfjall) that's less than an hour away from my home is pretty inspiring.

If you had an unlimited budget to make a game from any Nintendo franchise, which would you pick and what would you do with it?

JOON: I would make the mother of all WarioWare games. A sequel to Smooth Moves, but so far out there, it would be unpalatable. At first. But then it starts to reveal itself as this beautifully playful, miles-outside-of-your-comfort-zone joy generator. The WarioWare series is the best playground for combining new designs with new technologies and a room full of willful participants who do not need to be convinced much to go down on all fours and wave a Joy-Con around like a tail. I would commission dozens of indie devs who are making innovative little gems that don't fit into a marketplace and make them make minigames as well as the metagames that those minigames fit into.

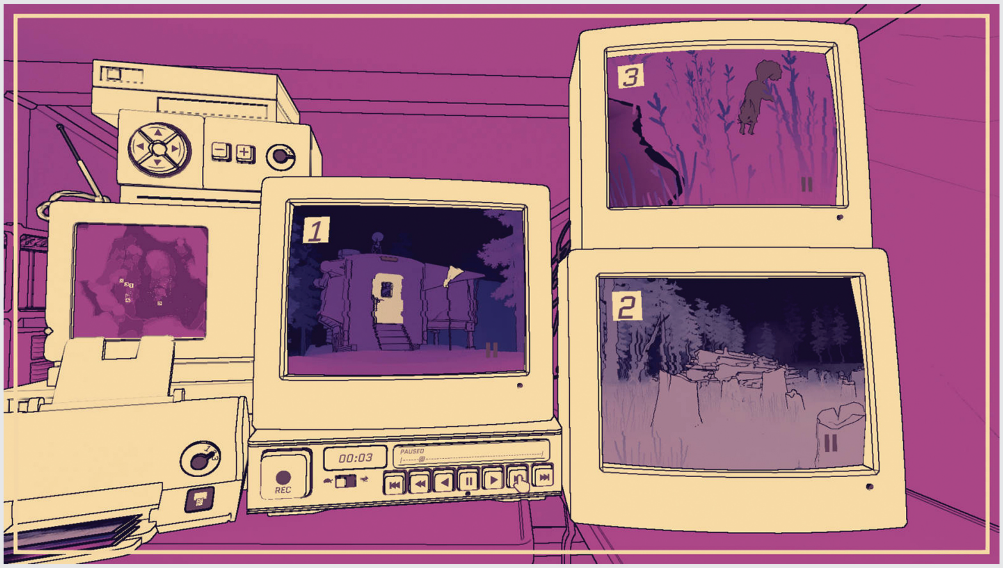
People will throw house parties just so they can play 24-player Wario Mega-Ware tournaments!

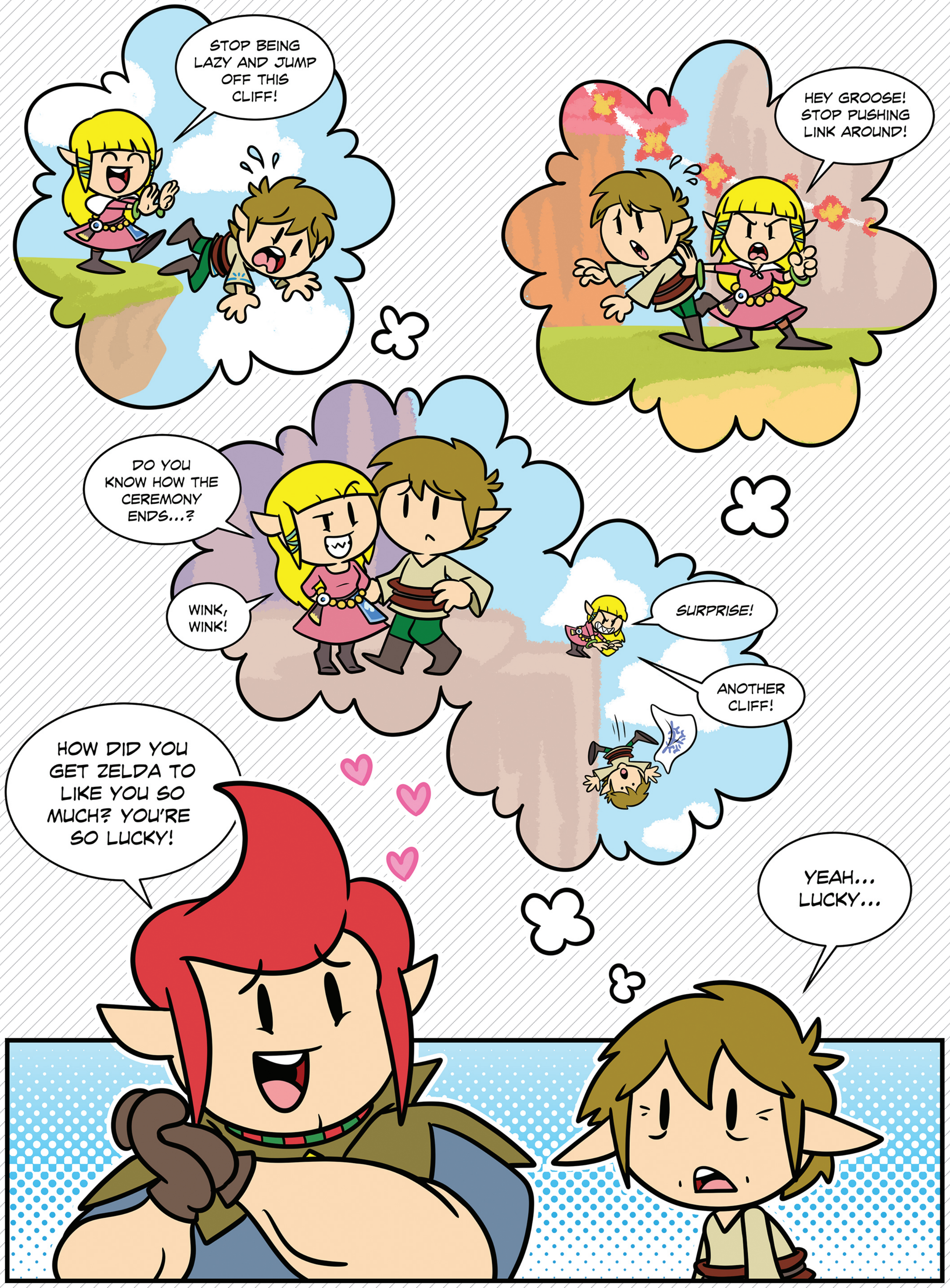
There'd be a Joon amiibo that unlocks even more hidden minigames that will take people 100 years to catalog!

. . . Are you still with me?

Finally, if you could have any superpower, what would it be and why?

JOON: Ten years as an indie developer who is lucky enough to travel to a lot of places and meet a lot of people has left me with so many scattered friends that I want to hang out with, and now more than ever, that's difficult. So I would first get the COVID-19 vaccine the non-superpowered way, and then choose teleportation.





BY MATTHEW LOFFHAGEN

We've filled our Photodex, and now it's time to render a verdict for New Pokémon Snap!

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: BANDAI NAMCO
RATING: E

A Pokémon Photo Safari

NEW POKÉMON SNAP

IN THE LATE '90S, the diligent developers at HAL Laboratory were working on a game based on Jack and the Beanstalk – and getting nowhere. It was supposed to be a photography game, but progress had stalled for years because there wasn't anything fun to photograph. The beanstalk? Jack himself? The old cow he'd traded in for the handful of magic beans?

Enter Satoru Iwata. As he so often did for so many floundering projects, Mr. Iwata got the game back on course by convincing the devs to scrap the old children's story as a source of inspiration and swap in Pokémon characters instead. Mr. Iwata ended up working together with Shigeru Miyamoto on the game, which became the original Pokémon Snap – and the power of that collaboration and the beautiful simplicity of the idea to have Pokémon characters be the stars of the virtual photo safari combined to create a true classic of the N64 era.

Decades passed. Pokémon Snap never saw a sequel while Mr. Iwata was still with us. But I think it's a wonderful coincidence that New Pokémon Snap finally arrived right alongside the release of the Ask Iwata book – this is yet another experience that just wouldn't have existed without him!

New Pokémon Snap expertly expands on the design of the N64 original. Once again, players are cast as young photographers sent out on short excursions into the wilderness of the Pokémon world, camera at the ready to take snapshots of every interesting creature in sight and all of their unique behaviors. The challenge is that you're riding in a constantly moving vehicle – so there's no patiently waiting in one spot to get just the right shot. You've got to snap on the move, then quickly shift to spot the next great Kodak moment!

This core gameplay is still just as appealing as it first was back in 1999 – but again, everything's made grander here, infusing more fun.

There's a much larger variety of Pokémon, for instance. Only five dozen or so different species pulled from the original 151 franchise creatures appeared in the original, but this sequel has over 200 types! What's more, they're drawn pretty evenly from all eight mainline generations, so no matter what region you first explored as a Trainer – Hoenn or Unova or Alola, etc. – you'll find familiar faces here.

There's a larger variety of tools. Getting the perfect picture often means working to directly influence the environment ahead of time, whether by tossing out a piece of fruit as a bit of bait for a 'mon or playing a bit of music to see if you can inspire them to dance. Pester Balls were wisely left in the past – they were a bit mean-spirited – but they've been replaced by the ingenious Illumina Orbs. They serve a double purpose, both lighting up Pokémon with a temporary bioluminescent glow that helps them become more visible in photos snapped under a night sky as well as also fueling the story of this sequel. Why do some Pokémon and plants in this specific part of the world illuminate themselves the way that they do? It's not a terribly gripping narrative, but it gives the whole adventure a bit more context than the original had, back when Professor Oak just sent Todd out into the wild again and again without as much reason.

(Speaking of Todd, he's back! I'm thrilled that the developers preserved the timeline, so to speak, and reintroduced him here as an adult. A nice nostalgic nod.)

This sequel's approach of taking the first game's features and amping them up continues when you finish a trip and head back to home base with your camera loaded up with images: The professor's evaluation time is more complex than before. But, unfortunately, this is where New Snap falls a bit short for me.

Photos are critiqued and assigned points in several different categories, but it isn't always clear why some shots are judged better than others. Take the "Background" metric, for

instance. I've had several photos that, to me, have had very picturesque backgrounds behind whichever Pokémon is the primary subject matter of the image – yet scoring points in this category seems arbitrary. Most of the time it'll just be nil, contributing nothing to the overall score. Other times you'll get points there even though the background is nothing special at all.

Single-creature focus is also a problem. If several separate species can be seen in the same shot, the game will only recognize the photo as being "of" one of them. And sometimes it makes wildly weird decisions: You might snap a shot of a Slugma that's sliding by close to the camera, but the game will decide it's *actually* a photo of the Torkoal that was barely visible somewhere in the distance.

There's also a separate rating system that assigns between one and four stars to each shot, and then *another* system that makes those stars appear to be bronze, silver, gold or "rainbow." The logic behind all of it remains fuzzy even after hours of play.

Still, those are small frustrations, and even sometimes add to the humor of playing – it's like Professor Mirror has poor eyesight. (He does wear glasses, after all!)

Lastly, the greatest addition is the Re-Snap feature, which allows you to edit your photos after the fact. Your scores are always based on how well you snapped each shot in motion, but if you end up having a favorite or two that are just a bit off, you can Re-Snap them to adjust the zoom, the angle and more. You can then go really bonkers and add zany stickers or goofy captions, then cap it all off by uploading your final masterpieces to the Internet for other players to enjoy. All of that is brilliant. Snap works so well as a social experience! (And it's another game made better by having kids in the room as you play it, too.)

New Pokémon Snap isn't totally perfect, but it is a lovingly, intelligently updated take on a now 22-year-old original that only came to life because it was imbued with Mr. Iwata's magic. I know seeing this sequel would have made him smile. **– LUCAS**

9.0

A PROFESSIONAL TOUCH

Armchair amateurs like yours truly make up the majority of the audience for this adventure, of course, but there's also at least one actual professional photographer working in the Lental region! Ayato, a Japanese photo pro, has been posting expertly composed and edited New Pokémon Snap photos to his Twitter account, @ayato28_ps. Pictured here is just a small sampling of the dozens of excellent images he's crafted. (Do they make you feel inspired . . . or intimidated?)

The Cartoon Comes to Life on Switch

DC SUPER HERO GIRLS: TEEN POWER

IF YOU CAME here expecting another run-of-the-mill, poor-quality licensed game, you're out of luck. DC Super Hero Girls: Teen Power may not be a life-altering masterpiece, but it doesn't strive to be. Instead, it presents you with something more akin to "Action Games 101," effectively training anyone who plays it to understand the basics of what makes the genre tick, all while being pretty good fun in the process.

The game centers around a group of heroes and villains who all attend the same high school. The heroes consist of Supergirl, Wonder Woman, Batgirl, Green Lantern, Bumblebee and Zatanna, while the villain side features Harley Quinn, Catwoman, Star Sapphire, Giganta, Livewire and Poison Ivy. You start out as Supergirl, then gradually unlock other heroes to choose from. Unfortunately, the only other two you get to play as are Batgirl and Wonder Woman, leaving the other three sidelined for most of the action.

The good news is, there's more to the roster than just heroes! About halfway through the campaign you can unlock Harley Quinn, Star Sapphire and Catwoman to help you combat the mutual threat facing your respective teams. That threat is Toyman (and another villain who is pulling the strings who I won't spoil here, but shouldn't come as much of a surprise to those familiar with the source material).

While it's a bummer that you can't control half of the characters the story revolves around, the ones you do get are impressively varied, with unique strengths and weaknesses to master. Supergirl can fly, but her attacks are slow. Star Sapphire can use projectiles, but doesn't fight well up close. Harley Quinn has a giant hammer, but she bounces around like Mario in a Frog Suit when she walks. It takes some getting used to, but it's all very well balanced.

But combat is just the beginning. A surprising amount of new mechanics are introduced throughout the adventure: There are elements of stealth, tower defense, bomb defusal, fashion, city building, photography and more. There's even an entire in-game social network that you can easily sink tons of time into if you aren't careful.

That may seem like a lot to wrap your head around, but the actual act of performing these tasks has been simplified just enough so that anyone can consistently perform them without the game feeling dull. Yes, there's a degree of monotony in that there are very few fighting combos to use and you wind up battling different-colored variants of the same handful of enemies for the entirety of the game, but in the approximately 8+ hours it took me to finish the main campaign, I never felt particularly bored, and I barely scratched the surface of the game's optional sidequest content.

Visually, the game does a fantastic job of matching the look and feel of the cartoon. There are moments when the visual style is incredibly striking – though occasionally you'll encounter times when the 3D models don't quite jive with the cel shading.

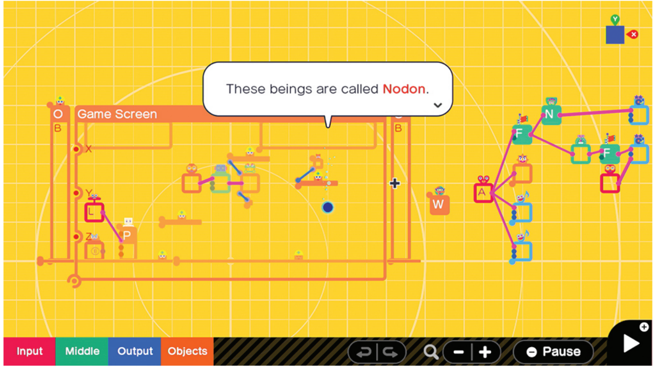
The characters also animate extremely well . . . except for the lip syncing. That wouldn't be so bad if it weren't for the awe-inspiringly expressive eye animations that go with them. They're honestly brilliant, but when combined with the wacky mouth movements the whole thing becomes weirdly off-putting.

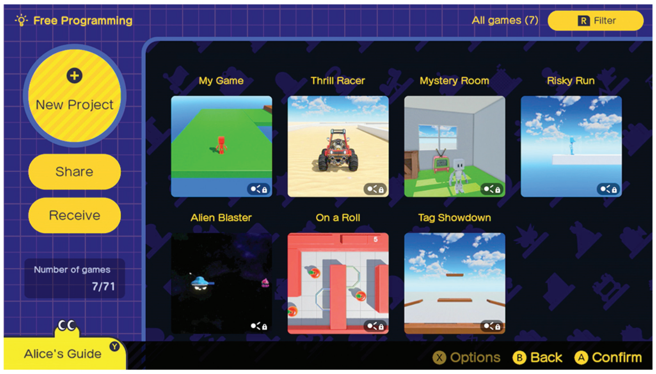
The voice acting is done well during the story segments, but in battle the same few clips get constantly recycled to an annoying degree. And the soundtrack, while perfectly adequate in small doses, gets a little stale after a few hours.

In the end, DC Super Hero Girls: Teen Power gets way more right than it gets wrong. The cast is delightfully diverse both in terms of ethnicity and body types, and while the plot isn't going to win any awards, the characters are fun and endearing. If you or anyone you know has ever expressed any interest in this game or the show it's based on, you likely won't be disappointed. **— KRIS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: TOYBOX
RATING: E10+

7.0





Learn How to Make Games

GAME BUILDER GARAGE

NINTENDO LABO LIVES! Just without the cardboard stuff.

A couple of years ago, Nintendo brought the Labo product line into the world. It was a set of Switch experiences that reached beyond the screen and into reality by introducing a set of quirky cardboard controllers that you would assemble yourself, step by step. There was a fishing game controlled by a physical cardboard rod with a real reel. A piano that you'd slot your Switch into. A bird toy that asked you to stick your face into its rear end and squeeze a pair of triggers to make it actually flap its wings.

But buried behind all those tangible toys taking up almost all of the Labo line's spotlight was a side mode that got very little attention: Toy-Con Garage. It was a neat programming space that allowed tinkering minds to play around and invent new ways for the cardboard controllers to be used. Later, the final Labo product, the VR Kit, expanded the Garage mode even further and let anyone who discovered it (and took the time to learn its complicated interface) make their own small video games playable in VR.

The problem? It was entirely antisocial! Nintendo provided no way for custom game projects built in the Labo Garage to be shared. And, even worse, video capture for games running in VR is next to impossible, so the YouTubers and Twitch streamers who'd normally be able to spread the word of such a thing weren't able to do so. The Garage was a lonely place, only enjoyed by solo creators making games just for them to play alone.

But no more! Game Builder Garage has just been surprise-revealed and then launched mere weeks later (as it wasn't even known to be happening when we published our last issue!). This game revives the Toy-Con Garage interface from a couple of years ago, but axes all the Labo connections and polishes everything to become a standalone experience – and one that is thankfully packed with plenty of tutorials to teach newcomers.

Say hello to the Nodon! Every single little programming command has been personified as a character, infusing Nintendo magic into what would otherwise be an entirely mundane endeavor. You meet the Person Nodon: It controls the position, size and basic actions of a standard player character. The Button Nodon: It registers when a button has been pressed, then takes an action that you instruct it to take. The Stick Nodon that manages Control Stick inputs. Object Nodons that place objects into the field of play. A Game Screen Nodon that determines what is visible – and what isn't – when your game begins.

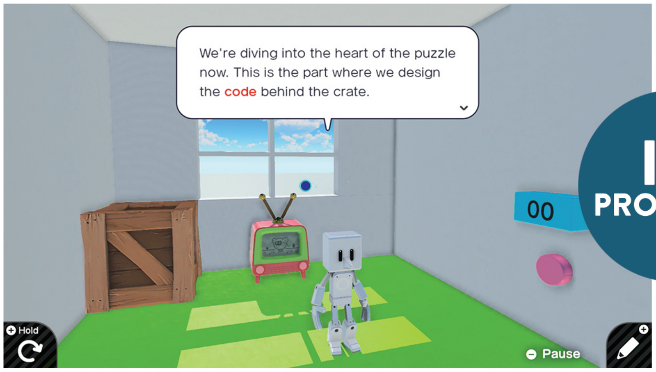
And on and on and on. There are dozens of increasingly complicated and niche-use Nodon characters to meet and arrange all together – and it would seem overwhelming, except a guided set of tutorials slowly and patiently walks you through everything you need to know one step at a time.

Game Builder Garage includes seven games that serve as examples of what the software's capable of building, and you build each one from scratch, one piece at a time, while guided by tiny tutorial characters. Like the Labo kits helped you assemble complex cardboard controllers by breaking the whole process down into as many individual steps as it took to make their construction accessible to anyone of any skill level, so too should any player with basic reading ability be able to follow along here and make video games out of nothing!

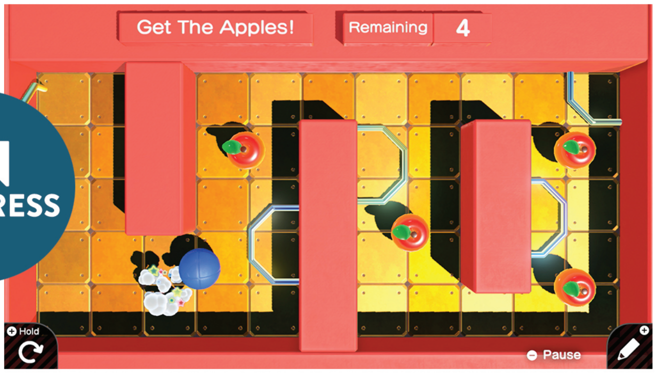
I'm excited by the possibilities – but I'm not ready to pass judgement on Game Builder Garage yet. It has just been available for less than a week as we're wrapping up this issue (a week overlapping with E3, no less), so I haven't yet had sufficient time to really dig into everything it offers. I'll withhold a rating until next time, which will give me more time to hopefully craft a true Lucas original using this interface!

I'm also eager to see if Carter will take to this too – his levels in Super Mario Maker 2 have become more and more impressively creative and complex over the last couple of years, so setting this more fully-featured game builder in front of him and letting him go to town should be the perfect way to judge if it's recommendable for the kids in your life as well. Stay tuned! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RATING: E



IN PROGRESS



Localized a Bit Too Quickly?

STORY OF SEASONS: PIONEERS OF OLIVE TOWN

WHEN THE TRAILER for Story of Seasons: Pioneers of Olive Town hit Nintendo Direct late last year, I was surprised to see that not only would it be released in early 2021, but only a month after its Japanese debut. The first original Story of Seasons title for the Nintendo Switch (and the 25th anniversary title), Pioneers of Olive Town looked promising at first glance – but as the seasons turned, my experience began to get dull and repetitive.

Like many previous titles, you're a young farmer who's inherited their grandfather's farmstead. This time, it's on the outskirts of the seaside community of Olive Town, founded by your grandfather and some of the older Olive Town "townies," including Mayor Victor. He's hoping to spruce up Olive Town and turn it into a tourist destination worthy of visits from huge cruise ships, while your goal is to turn the abandoned farmstead – complete with dilapidated coops, silos and other structures – back into a working farm. Fields can be tilled pretty much anywhere there is arable land, there are plenty of trees and rocks to break into materials and there's a new water-draining mechanic to clear puddles and build coal-fired pumps to drain lakes.

Unfortunately, my experience was marred by issues that made me feel like the game had been rushed to market. Some of them were amusing – like everyone eating the exact same three-course meal – but a lot of them dealt with farming mechanics.

You're currently only able to ship 24 different item types a day – and even with upgrades, your backpack can fill up pretty fast. You need to process wood and ore to turn them into crafting materials, but the base maker machines only produce one item at a time – and if you have multiple makers on your property, it begins to affect the framerate. Pointing your farmer in the right direction to perform an action can be tricky, and interacting with livestock – while you no longer need tools like the clippers or brush – still feels like a chore since you have to stand next to them and hammer A to take care of all their needs. Upgraded makers and a few other QOL improvements, such as more precise movement controls, will be addressed in the upcoming Version 1.5 patch that is set to be implemented worldwide after this issue goes to press.

Despite all these issues, there was one introduction that I really loved: my farmer's moped. Once I was able to fix it, I had so much fun making my farmer ride around on it – enough that once I managed to restore the stable and tame the abandoned horse, I just left it in there.

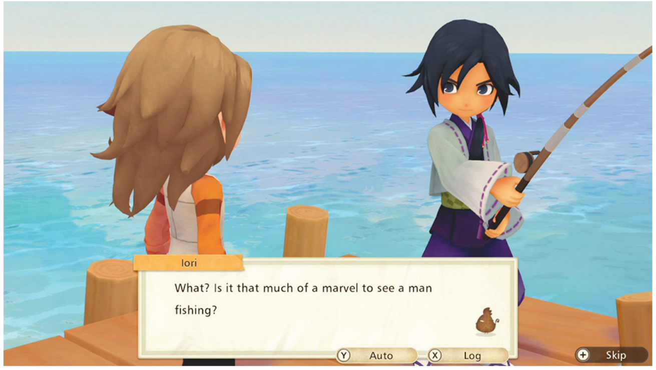
I managed to roll credits on the main story before the winter of my first year by playing in Seedling Mode, but it didn't really give me a huge sense of accomplishment: I barely noticed any of the improvements done to Olive Town, except for a change in the music (it became brassier and livelier). The museum could have also been implemented a little better: It's basically a drop-off point for photos, fish and treasures, which you can buy "replicas" of at the store. Like many mechanics here, Stardew Valley not only did it first, but did it better.

As for the DLC offerings, if you like seeing your farmer and the marriage partners dress up in silly costumes, you'll be satisfied. So far, we've gotten a multi-part event with a built-in fetchquest and a new map with some villagers and marriage candidates from Harvest Moon: A New Beginning, then a place to fish and nothing else. I would have liked to see a store selling hard-to-find crops or goods.

Hopefully by the time you're reading this review, Pioneers of Olive Town will be a better experience across the board – I'm eager to get back to improving my farm and going on fishing dates with Iori. It feels like the very narrow gap between Japan's release date and ours worked against it, and I would not have minded waiting a few more months for a more polished final release. **– REBECCA**

6.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: MARVELOUS (XSEED)
RATING: E10+



Bye Bye Bydo

R-TYPE FINAL 2

IF YOU PLAY R-Type Final 2 on any of its first four difficulty settings, the Stage 1 boss is chilled in ice. Look closely and you'll see it's actually the giant H.R. Giger-inspired monster from the very first R-Type, except with its body covered in a thick coat of unbreakable frost. Only the little alien face on its belly pokes out, occasionally shooting lasers.

It's a metaphor for R-Type Final 2 as a whole. The real game – the one that does right by the R-Type name – is frozen under a surface-level experience that's pretty lifeless.

My first playthrough of R-Type Final 2 left me ready to score it as a 6. It wasn't terrible, but it did absolutely nothing worth talking about – and this is coming from an R-Type fan of over 30 years. That changed after I dug deeper . . . but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Unlike most shmups, R-Type constantly dances between the need for offense and defense. A few seconds into every stage, you have the chance to grab a "Bit" that gives you better weaponry (bouncing lasers, DNA-shaped photon torpedoes, etc.) when it's attached to your ship's front or back. It can also work as a shield, absorbing any projectiles and smaller enemies that it collides with, or be launched out like a cannonball, leaving a path of destruction in its wake. Then you can leave it detached, or pull it back to your ship to help keep you safe. These moment-to-moment choices between using your Bit for destruction or protection lie at the heart of the series.

R-Type Final 2 was supposed to be a grand return to this unique style of action. And it is! Eventually. More than anything, I'm frustrated that the game doesn't lead with its "A" material. I'm worried people will play through it once on a lower difficulty, assume they've seen it all, and walk away unimpressed. On that setting, the game is still tough, but it rarely pushes you to use your best strategies – and with limited continues, you barely have a chance to learn from trial and error. Thankfully, that's just the tip of the alien iceberg.

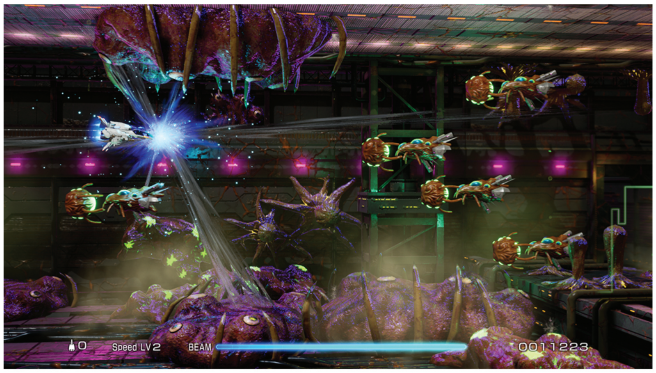
Playing through the game once on the easiest difficulty isn't that fun, but it's the best way to start. Not only does it set the table for what's to come, but it gets you a lot of the important unlocks. The more you play, the more continues you'll get later on (this is never explained!) and the more ships you can acquire (also never explained!!). Before you know it, you've got plenty of options, and those options lead to a richer experience. There are over 50 ships to add to your hanger (with more to come in future updates), and a handful of alternate stages and bonuses to discover on supplemental playthroughs, so it will be a while before you see it all.

After you get infinite continues and some more powerful ships, you can experience the "real" R-Type Final 2 by playing it on higher difficulties. It's boldly unfair! Death comes from everywhere. Even trial and error won't get you through some challenges, as some boss attacks are randomized. Remember that monster frozen in ice? If you play on "R-Typer" difficulty (one of the hardest settings), it's totally thawed out, attacking with purple snakes of light that you can barely see. You'll need to use all your strategy, skill, ships and continues to survive. It actually took me a solid hour to eventually beat that one boss, but when I did, I felt fantastic.

I had high expectations for R-Type Final 2; its direct predecessor is one of my favorite games in the genre. To this day, I still rant to strangers about its massive collection of bizarre ships, its daringly cryptic branching paths and its boldly avant-garde final stage. The sequel doesn't quite soar to the same heights, but after you start unlocking its better content, it "finally" becomes a solid, compelling, long overdue return to the beloved, iconic series.
– JONATHAN

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NIS AMERICA
DEVELOPER: GRANZELLA
RATING: E10+



The RPG Starring Whoever You Want!

MIITOPIA

THERE IS AN obvious appeal about getting to cast your own party members (and the villain!) in an RPG. Making new Miis or sourcing them from the Nintendo Network can make for some truly hilarious combinations with famous faces and your family. My four-year-old glommed onto this game from the beginning, wanting to be on my team and in my room. He was thrilled that he was IN THE GAME.

I just wish the rest of the game was that engaging.

The story is trite: simply having the big bad steal faces and slap them on monsters. Scenarios unfold from there but are mostly built as 10-second setups of fetchquests.

Miitopia practically runs itself. Aside from a few decisions that need to be made, there is very little to actually do. The game only prompts you to pick a path or occasionally make a decision in the odd vignettes that take place in between auto-running. Thank goodness for the fast-forward button!

You control your own Mii in battle, but can't choose other team members' actions.

At the end of each field is an inn that is always the same. You can spend your gold on gear and weapons or feed Miis food you make or find in the field that raises their stats, and this is all apart from the leveling up from EXP gained in battle. Certain characters like or hate certain foods, so it's trial and error whether you get more or less out of each food item.

Next, the characters can interact and develop relationships by spending time in the same room. The game also provides scenarios that raise relationship levels in battle, in vignettes or after plot points. You can even design a horse to join you and spend time with! Outing tickets send two party members off to cafés, cinemas and even the beach for little vignettes that often net food or some other bonus.

The other tickets you can get are game tickets, where you can spin a roulette wheel for prizes or play Rock/Paper/Scissors for gold. While the game itself rewards tickets fleetingly, almost every amiibo that doesn't give a special outfit nets you game tickets.

I had plenty of gold, but the game randomly offers you a chance to buy items, and sometimes your character doesn't want anything, suggesting the game is attempting to keep you from getting overpowered.

The battles are so easy that I rarely got attacked unless it was a boss fight.

Something that confused me was why my characters asked for food in the inns and constantly mentioned food while running. I thought I was doing something wrong, but noticed that even after leaving an inn with a character completely stuffed, the first thing they mentioned on the field was that they were hungry. Eventually I came to the conclusion that your character's purported hunger had no bearing on anything in the game, and it wasn't something I could fix because you can't buy food.

Miitopia is a fun first RPG for young kids, and while it can also be fun for adults, the game quickly gets repetitive and unrewarding. It would be better as a multiplayer game on Switch, or even an online outing that had more to do. It really defeats itself as a solo game.

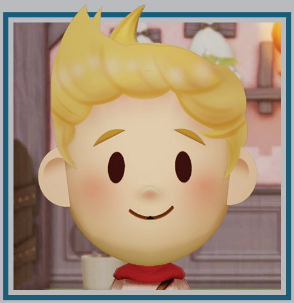
Its real appeal lies not in the RPG adventure itself, then, but in how wildly robust the new Mii-making interface is. Some people may want to pick up the game for that feature alone — and to illustrate why, we've got some examples on the next page.
— BRETT

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO & GREZZO RATING: E

STRONGBAD
@mitsamemario

BLATHERS
@lulul0u



LUCAS
@earthbound64

MR. CLEAN
@The_Ultra_Nerd

KIRBY
@Kekeflipnote

MONITA
@Jalli128

ZAGREUS
@Twili_Princess

RICO
@HypraSeaPea

TINGLE
@KiddComets

GALLERY OF GREATNESS!

WAIT A MINUTE . . . *these* are *Miis?*

The expanded capabilities of the new Mii editor included in the Switch port of Miitopia are *so* expanded that it's now possible for creators to craft characters that look unlike Miis at all! Remember, Mii characters were first introduced way back in 2006 at the launch of the Wii console, and they were originally intended to simply serve as in-game avatars representing the players who were playing. You'd pick from a handful of hairstyles, eye shapes and the like and come up with something that kind of looked like yourself. Or maybe a celebrity.

Now, though, Miitopia on Switch has opened the floodgates to an all-new era of creativity with a wild array of new editing options! Here are just a few of the Miis that have had #Miitopia on Twitter buzzing, along with their makers' handles. (Seek them out to see even more examples of excellence!) — **LUCAS**

GARFIELD
@stardraw123

STEVE
@driftrud

BEAT
@MechanicalMagi3

MARINA
@ThePinkMeaniie

V-BUCKS CARD
@THE_Lucbomber

THIS.
@SuspendedSpirit

HOTEL MARIO
@milkystar64

AKU
@Red_Bakeneko

MONA LISA
@Nakios_

9.0 LUCAS

SECOND OPINION
MONSTER HUNTER RISE

9.0 EVAN

UNLIKE LUCAS, I've been cutting down the fantastical creatures of Monster Hunter for over a decade. This actually marks my fourth critique of the franchise for this magazine! And once again, Capcom has created a thrilling and satisfying action RPG for those willing to fight through Monster Hunter Rise's frustrating tutorials and menu systems.

Look, Lucas is right on target regarding his troubles with the game's onboarding system. Monster Hunter Rise throws what feels like endless walls of text at you for hours and hours. It's definitely better than previous entries, but still doesn't do a good enough job of conveying the basics to newcomers. In fact, my recommendation is just talking with a seasoned hunter to figure things out.

I do appreciate, however, how the game does away with a lot of the fluff of previous installments. Almost every quest focuses on bringing down one (or more) of the imposing monsters, like the amphibious Tetranadon, dragon-like Rathian and the flagship purple kitty Magnamalo. No longer is the mission list stuffed with boring filler – the days of delivering mushrooms or slaying small critters are left in the past, for the most part.

The biggest transformation is undoubtedly the addition of the Wirebug mechanic. Whipping around with a magical grappling hook makes traversing the open-world maps a zip. Plus, it brings about so many fighting options! For instance, I rarely utilize the Long Sword's Serene Pose counter, because it drains two bug meters. But the vertical Spirit Helm Breaker where I rain down a devastating blow hasn't gotten old after 70+ hours.

Of course, the doggish Palamute companion also assists in battling, but it's their saddle that helps the most. Holding the A Button will let you jump on for a ride. So now you can quickly chase after your prey, as well as pick up herbs and 'shrooms and even mine ore on the go. This all might sound like a no-brainer – yet I'm old enough to remember spending considerable time focusing on farming missions.

Another aspect that deserves praise is the visual style and performance of Monster Hunter Rise. Seriously, I'm continually impressed that this experience is running on Switch, especially when factoring in the minimal load times. I haven't broken out a stopwatch, but even when joining an online hunt, I'd guesstimate you never wait longer than 20 seconds before running after your target in one the game's striking environments. (Shrine Ruins and Lava Caverns are probably my favorite sites.)

Since release, Monster Hunter Rise has evolved thanks to two large, free updates: 2.0 and 3.0. Arriving in April and May, respectively, they introduced Elder Dragons, like Teostra; endgame content that raises the Hunting Rank past 7; and even the full narrative ending featuring a battle against Ibushi followed by Narwa.

The additional monsters are the high point for me and work alongside raising your rank. What begins with frustration against these powerful beasts turns into pride when you dismantle them with ease days or weeks later. Chameleos serves as the first Elder Dragon from Update 2.0 at HR20 and proves a mighty challenge up front. (I fainted more than I care to admit at first against that poison-spewing lizard with wings.)

But over time and after upgrading my armor, the camouflage dragon became a routine undertaking. Recently, while playing with a group of randoms online, we collectively felled Chameleos in only seven minutes! I'm looking forward to more rematches, too, since the beast's bits feed into crafting the strongest Long Sword.

Speaking of online, Monster Hunter Rise provides a proficient experience for linking up with friends or strangers. It's snappy and lag seems minimal, though the menu interface hinders things, as usual. You're expected to chat with a Palico in the Steelworks area to see which friends are hosting a lobby instead of just easily accessing a friend list. Honestly, this all circles back to Nintendo's overall lack of a party system for Switch, alongside voice chat. I've been complaining about this for over a decade now too!

That said, I've had a blast meeting up with buddies for Monster Hunter Mondays over the past couple of months. We utilize Discord for chatting, and the in-game experience has been pretty wonderful. Joining a hunt midway through is welcomed, and people can even go on different quests from the same lobby.

These weekly sessions have made me realize that Monster Hunter has become my gaming equivalent of comfort food. There's something so relaxing and relieving about hacking away at an awe-inspiring beast with a group of guys while talking about Marvel movies, our current armor set wishlist or the next Zelda title. Failing a quest doesn't even feel like that big of a deal. We're still gaining some resources as well as picking up on strategies for another go-round.

After all these years, Monster Hunter Rise stands out as my favorite entry in the long-running series. The updates mean I have new goals to chase, like reaching HR100 to face off against Crimson Glow Valstrax. (And I look forward to the patches Capcom has promised for the future.) Like Lucas, I wholeheartedly agree that this is an experience worth checking out, especially with friends by your side. **– EVAN**

ARCHIVE

The complete list of Nintendo Force retail reviews from the past two years. Scores reflect individual reviewers' opinions.

SWITCH

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
AI: The Somnium Files	8.5	Tony	#44
Animal Crossing: New Horizons	9.0	Rebecca	#46
Ary and the Secret of Seasons	6.0	Lucas	#49
Astral Chain	8.5	Jonathan	#42
Atelier Ryza 2: Lost Legends & the Secret Fairy	8.0	Maggie	#51
Bakugan: Champions of Vestroia	6.5	Lucas	#51
Balan Wonderworld	5.0	Lucas	#52
Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night	7.5	Tony	#48
Bravely Default II	9.0	Nadia	#52
BurgerTime Party!	8.0	Lucas	#44
Catherine: Full Body	8.5	Jonathan	#49
Clubhouse Games: 51 Worldwide Classics	8.5	Lucas	#48
Cobra Kai: The Karate Kid Saga Continues	6.5	Kris	#50
Contra: Rogue Corps	7.0	David	#43
Crash Bandicoot 4: It's About Time!	8.5	David	#52
Crash Team Racing: Nitro-Fueled	8.0	David	#41
Daemon X Machina	7.0	Chris	#42
Deadly Premonition 2: A Blessing in Disguise	7.0	Jonathan	#49
Digimon Story: Cyber Sleuth – Complete Edition	8.5	Josh	#44
Dragon Quest Builders 2	9.0	Shesez	#41
Dragon Quest XI S: Echoes of an Elusive Age – Definitive Edition	9.5	Lucas	#43
Fire Emblem: Three Houses	9.5	Lucas	#41
Friday the 13th: The Game – Ultimate Slasher Edition	8.0	Kevin C.	#46
Ghostbusters: The Video Game Remastered	7.5	Brett	#43
Guacamelee! One-Two Punch Collection	9.0	Jonathan	#42
Heroland	7.0	Rebecca	#45
Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity	8.5	Tony	#50
Ice Age: Scrat's Nutty Adventure!	5.0	Chris	#45
Indivisible	7.0	Tony	#47
John Wick Hex	7.5	Chris	#51
Kingdom Hearts: Melody of Memory	7.0	Tony	#50
Langrisser I & II	8.5	David	#46
Layton's Mystery Journey: Katrielle and the Millionaires' Conspiracy – Deluxe Edition	8.5	Brett	#45
Luigi's Mansion 3	9.0	Chris	#44
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games: Tokyo 2020	8.5	David	#44
Mario Kart Live: Home Circuit	9.5	Lucas	#49
Marvel Ultimate Alliance 3: The Black Order	7.0	Brett	#41
Mega Man Zero/ZX Legacy Collection	9.0	David	#45
Model Debut #nicola	7.0	Rebecca	#44
Monster Hunter Rise	9.0	Lucas	#52
Moving Out	8.0	Lucas	#47
New Super Lucky's Tale	9.0	David	#44
Nickelodeon Kart Racers 2: Grand Prix	7.0	David	#50
Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch	9.0	Brett	#43
Paper Mario: The Origami King	8.5	Brett	#48
Paw Patrol Mighty Pups: Save Adventure Bay!	8.5	Lucas	#51
Persona 5 Strikers	9.0	Maggie	#52
Pikmin 3 Deluxe	9.5	Lucas	#50
Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Rescue Team DX	8.0	Lucas	#46
Pokémon Shield	9.0	Thor	#44
Pokémon Sword	8.0	Lucas	#44
Puyo Puyo Tetris 2	8.5	Rebecca	#50
Ring Fit Adventure	8.5	Matthew T.	#44
Rune Factory 4 Special	7.5	Rebecca	#46
Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin	8.5	Lucas	#50
Snack World: The Dungeon Crawl – Gold	6.0	Brett	#45
Spyro Reignited Trilogy	9.0	David	#42
Star Wars Pinball	9.0	Lucas	#42
Story of Seasons: Friends of Mineral Town	7.5	Rebecca	#48
Super Mario 3D All-Stars	7.0	Lucas	#49
Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury	10	Lucas	#51
Super Mario Maker 2	10	Tony	#41
Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz	7.5	David	#44
Team Sonic Racing	8.5	David	#41
The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel III	9.0	Maggie	#49
The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel IV	9.0	Maggie	#52
The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening	9.5	Jonathan	#43
The Ninja Saviors: Return of the Warriors	7.0	Jonathan	#44
The Nintendo Switch Lite	9.0	Matthew L.	#43
The Outer Worlds	8.0	Matthew L.	#47
The Sega Genesis Mini	9.0	David	#43
The Wonderful 101: Remastered	9.0	Jonathan	#47
Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE Encore	7.5	Matthew L.	#46
Trials of Mana	8.5	Brett	#47
Trine 4: The Nightmare Prince	9.0	Lucas	#44
Wolfenstein: Youngblood	7.0	Chris	#41
Xenoblade Chronicles: Definitive Edition	10	Lucas	#48
Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair	9.0	Tony	#43

THE NP OPINION
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD

NF DIDN'T EXIST quite yet when Skyward Sword made its Wii debut at the end of 2011, so let's turn our attention once more to the Power that predated us. NP's official evaluation of the game was penned by none other than The Hoff himself, Chris Hoffman. And, in his assessment, it was "without a doubt worth the wait."

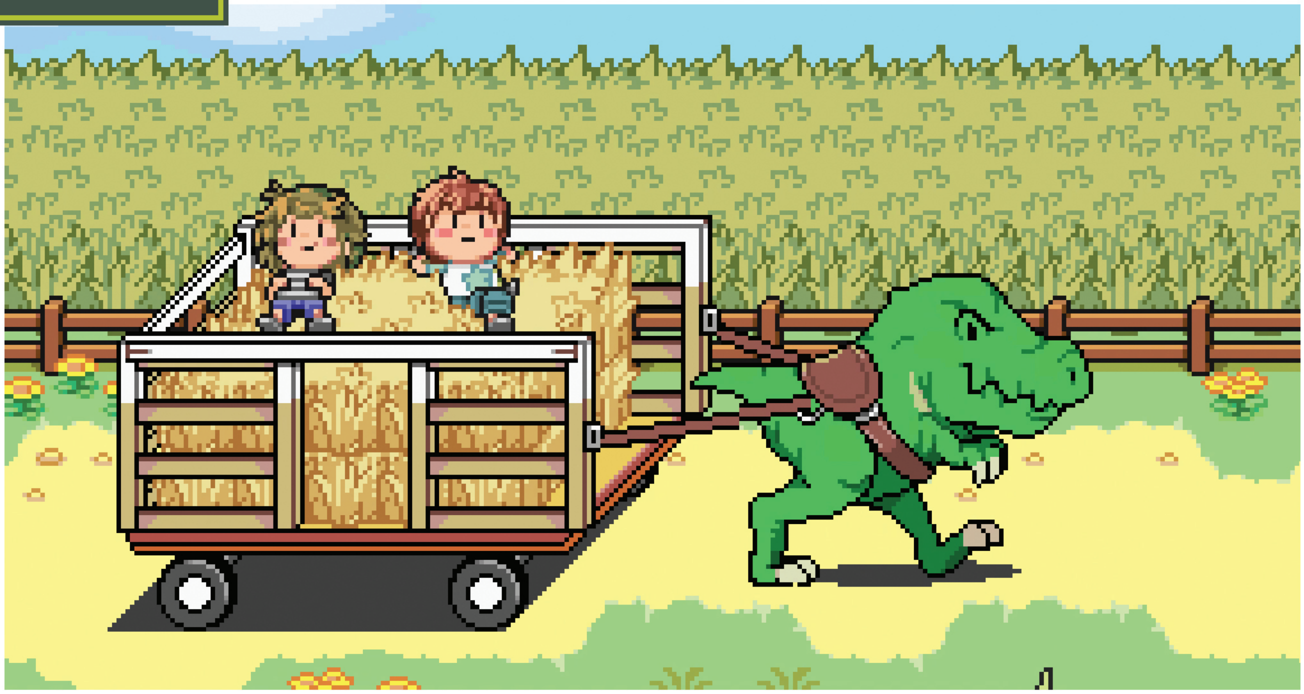
Assigning it a score of 9.5 out of 10, Chris' review obviously sang many of the praises of the game he declared "truly worthy of being called 'epic.'" That said, he also didn't shy away from presenting a few of the criticisms that have been echoed and amplified by others over the years. "Does it live up to the hype? In a lot of ways, yes; in some ways, no."

Chris complimented the new visual style, saying it "looks fantastic, and the watercolor backdrops provide a uniquely artistic way to deal with draw-distance issues." For the soundtrack, he wrote "the music is great . . . although the tunes aren't as memorable as those in many Zelda games." Oddly incongruous since it shipped with a CD, but I'd concur – nearly a decade later it's hard for me to immediately bring to mind any specific piece of the OST.

On the motion controls, Chris said "it takes a little practice to get comfortable" and "at times I was forced to recalibrate my controller or recenter the pointer in the thick of the action." That was the Wii era, all right, and how Skyward Sword HD's Joy-Con version of the same control scheme measures up will be a key component in our review of it next time, for sure.

Chris was on the same wavelength as our own Kris when he said "there's not a lot to do while you're flying through the wide-open skies," but did his best to appreciate the puzzle-packed overworld areas that Brett applauded earlier. Then, after a few final nitpicks, he ended things positively, saying "from aesthetics to level design, Nintendo's latest pretty much has it all." We'll soon see how well it all holds up after making the jump to the Switch! **– LUCAS**

COMMUNITY



STATE OF THE FANDOM

Mother's Here for the Long Haul

Shigesato Itoi's seminal series continues to inspire. We ask the driving force behind Mother Direct why!

THIS TIME LAST year, we took a look at the first-ever Mother Direct – a fan-made video broadcast that gathered together news and announcements from the community of creators whose work has been inspired by the Mother/EarthBound series of games. A second Mother Direct just went live this past June, and in advance of its debut, we sat down to talk with the director of both Mother Direct and the Mother Forever website, Kody NOKOLO.

NF: How did you first discover the Mother series, and what made you want to get involved with the community?
KODY: I discovered the series and its community in 2008 with the release of Super Smash Bros. Brawl, when I was 9 years old. Lucas and his role in Brawl's story mode pushed my curiosity about the series to the max since I was already wondering which game Ness and all of his content came from in Melee. I was determined to figure out how to play the Mother 3 Fan Translation and managed to play that as my first game in the series, which quickly spurred my other interests in video game writing and translations. After playing through EarthBound pretty soon after Mother 3, I wanted to get involved with the community, but I didn't know where to start.

For a while, I lurked around the Mother community just watching everything as an outsider. It wasn't until I went to the EarthBound convention Fangamer held in 2015 called "Camp Fangamer" that I really understood what the community was about, since I was finally able to participate in it there as less of an outsider. I still didn't participate in the community actively for a few more years, but people I briefly met at Camp Fangamer like Clyde Mandelin (creator of the Mother 3 Fan Translation) and Toby Fox (creator of Undertale) made it clear to me that I wanted to make translations and games for the community and beyond!

What do you think it is about the Mother series that has inspired so many fan works and other expressions of love from its community?
I think one of the driving features of the Mother series is that the community was built by fans, for fans. It may have been promoted by Nintendo of America during EarthBound's release, but it very quickly vanished from anything NOA promoted after that because of the initially poor sales. EarthBound had a distinct graphical style, awesome writing and an amazing translation. I think there were lots of people who noticed that, but had no outlet for it. Plenty of other Nintendo games had communities online that were fed pretty well with new merchandise and new games, but Mother always seemed to be the odd one out. And when a new game did get announced for the N64, it was cancelled! The Mother series has had kind of an underdog story, and I think that treatment of the series, along with EarthBound being such a special kind of game for its time, is what made people grow to love the games so much, and what inspired people to make their own content for it.

The Mother series has certainly been through high and lows. How would you describe the state of the community today? Is it at a high point, a low point, or somewhere in between?
Right now, I think the series is probably at the highest point it's been at in a long time because of the recent attention coming from the Hobonichi company, which started its "Hobonichi Mother Project" to celebrate the series. Shigesato Itoi, the games' creator, owns part of the copyright for the series, so anything that happens with it needs to be run by him. He owns Hobonichi, and that's why that company is the only one that's been able to make so much for the games. You might ask, "But why now?" Not many people realize that there's a huge Mother fan at Hobonichi, Yasuhiro Nagata, who

INTERVIEW BY JONATHAN HOLMES

worked his way up from just writing about the series and Nintendo in Famitsu to becoming Itoi's right-hand man. He's the largest force behind the Hobonichi Mother Project, and he even put together the Ask Iwata book! People tend to think of fans as separate from the series they love, but he's a great example of a Mother fan who's so passionate that he essentially is directing the series' developments right now! I think this is a great way of conceptualizing what will happen with the series in the future: It's all going to be by the fans.

Personally, I don't believe or expect Nintendo to ever make anything of the series themselves ever again. If any kind of compilation or new game were to happen, I don't believe Nintendo would have any hand in it outside of approving their share of the copyrights. The state of fan projects is so bright that I don't think Nintendo really matters, though. There's more we're only learning about the series recently too, including brand-new images, interviews and information about the series' lost N64 release that I was able to find, translate and showcase on our website. With Nagata working at Hobonichi to help create official merchandise with Mother fans' involvement, like Pollyanna, a book filled with artists' fan comics about the series, and with passionate fans working to make things for the series in other ways, like we did with Mother Forever, I think things are going very well for the community!

How did the idea for the Mother Direct series come about?

When Mother Forever was created last year, it was during a time when the pandemic was really beginning to hit hard. E3 had been cancelled, so that was one event in gaming that a lot of people didn't have to look forward to at a time that was already pretty tough. We noticed all of the amazing Mother-inspired projects that were being developed at the time, and all of us who work on the Mother Forever website thought of the Mother Direct as a way to promote all those projects in a Nintendo Direct-style format, for the Mother community and anyone else interested. It gave people something to look forward to at a time when Nintendo Directs or any other announcements were not really able to be prepared. After such a positive reaction to our Mother Direct last year, we knew we should continue them!

There is so much Mother fan content out there! With so much to choose from, how do you decide what projects to include in a Direct, and what to save for a blog post on Mother Forever or some other means of acknowledgment? Are striped shirts a requirement for entry?

What really separates the projects we choose for the Directs isn't necessarily how Mother-y they look or how well their striped shirts might fit! It's more about how they build on the ideas Mother presents, whether that's in their gameplay, their writing or their presentation. Having completed work, pictures, other footage or more to show for all those ideas is also important, so those ideas can be demonstrated to other people.

For this Direct, I had people send in their trailer ideas along with completed work on their projects to see if there was enough that could be presented by the time we asked for submissions, whether those projects built on or incorporated the ideas of Mother, and whether there was a thorough enough idea for what each project wanted to present. I think almost every submission we received had that Mother spirit, but ultimately I think it just came down to some projects needing a bit more time to complete their visions. I'm sure that if we continue the Mother Direct series, many of the projects that aren't there this year will be featured in the future!

What do you think it takes for a game to qualify as a "Mother-like"?

To tie this back to the last question, I believe that a "Mother-like" game or project just builds on the foundations of the Mother series. It doesn't have to be a "Mother 4" in the traditional sense to be like Mother. In this year's Mother Direct, I quoted Shigesato Itoi's words about Mother 4, which I think have a relevant meaning when it comes to "Mother-like" games, too. Itoi has said that "the very lives you're living now are Mother 4," and that's something I take to heart. In the lives we live, the projects we experience, and the games we play – if you see Mother in them, then they can be the next Mother 4 or a "Mother-like" to you. I think it's difficult to define what makes a "Mother-like" because there are so many different ways people find Mother in the lives they live and the things they experience.

You're the lead translator at Source Gaming, a massive resource for Smash interviews and other sought-after Nintendo-related information, and on top of that, you're making a game of your own called Gnomonic that's set to feature new music from Tomoya Tomita (Wario Land: Shake It!, Kirby's Epic Yarn, Yoshi's Woolly World). How do you approach all these big, sometimes complicated responsibilities while keeping your head above water?

It might seem like all those projects are separate, but they all take similar skills! I produce videos, write and translate on Source Gaming and Mother Forever, then I organize, write and direct between Mother Forever and on Gnomonic. I keep my head above water just by practicing those skills I need for multiple projects. The most complicated definitely has to be Gnomonic, because it pushes me to hone my skills with things like programming and level design that I don't get to practice as often, since it's really the only project I work on that needs those skills.

Has Nintendo talked to you at all about the Mother Directs or the Mother Forever website?

They haven't yet! I don't know for sure how it works when it comes to Mother copyright, but I feel that the big reason nothing has happened to Mother projects in the past is because Nintendo probably can't act without the permission of Shigesato Itoi, since he also owns part of the Mother copyright, and I think he just allows the fans to thrive if given the option. It might be likely that Mother projects are in a special position, where the game's fans can thrive without the threat of a shutdown. Nintendo's silence toward so many Mother community projects, even to some that have had monetary benefits, just seems too deafening compared to so many of their other properties.

If Nintendo of America finally announced an official localization of Mother 3, but that also meant shutting down the fan translations and all the other fan work that surrounds the series, how do you think fans would react? Would the trade-off be worth it?

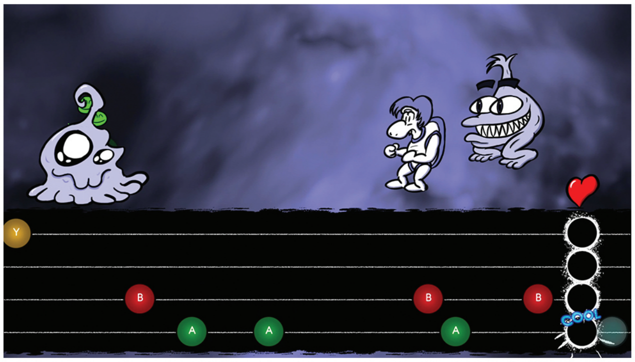
It might be nice to have that acknowledgment of the series initially, but I don't think fans would be happy about their own content being shut down, even if it meant more official Mother stuff. Fans have been the ones pushing this series for so long that I think Nintendo utilizing it more at the destruction of fans' work just wouldn't feel right. It might be nice to have an acknowledgment of the series with an official Mother 3 translation, but is that really worth it when the game already has an incredible translation? At this point, I feel the fans represent Mother more than Nintendo does, so I think that trade-off just wouldn't be worth it.

Anything else you want Nintendo Force readers to know about?

If you haven't yet, check out the Mother Direct to see what the Mother community has been up to lately! So many projects have worked hard to get to a point where they can show off their work there. Even if you're not a Mother fan, I hope the spirit of the series will shine through all the projects being presented this year! If you're interested in Mother's history, head to the Mother Forever website for all that and plenty more. And if you're interested in what Masahiro Sakurai's been up to outside of Smash, he writes bi-weekly magazine columns for Famitsu magazine that I translate for Source Gaming on YouTube. We work to get those videos posted on the same day that the columns hit Japanese newsstands, so check out our channel if you're interested in that and lots more gaming goodness, straight from the source!

Or, if you're craving a game that has a Mother-like atmosphere, some colorful graphics, shadow-based puzzles and a more active turn-based RPG system with the weird catch of a protagonist that can tell you're controlling them, then check out my game, Gnomonic!

MotherForever.net



FAN-MADE VIDEO EVENT

Mother Direct #2

The EarthBound faithful are back with an encore event!

NEAR THE END of this year's Mother Direct video event, a trailer for the new "We Are MOTHER" documentary summed up the thoughts that'd been bouncing through my brain the entire time I'd been tuned in: Mother has become "The Nintendo Series That Belongs to Us."

That's perfect. That's the entire truth of the current state of affairs for this famous franchise. In the absence of any new games coming out from Nintendo directly, the fandom has now, for several years, taken complete ownership of the brand – its past, present and future.

And Mother Direct is quickly becoming an all-new nexus for that community. One year ago, the original Mother Direct video was a fun diversion from the scariest earliest months of the global pandemic. But with a second installment that just debuted this past June 13, it's clear that wasn't a one-time thing! It's looking like Mother Direct will continue to be a regular occurrence going forward, providing updates on Mother-related and Mother-inspired fangames and other creative projects that are in the works.

Mother: Beyond Bounds opened the Direct. It's the game that gave us the header graphic used for our interview with Kody two pages ago: the giant, tamed T-Rex pulling a cart like a common farm animal. That's just one of the visual elements calling back to Mother 3, and out of all games featured it seems like Beyond Bounds looks the closest to what you might imagine an official Mother 4 would be. I'm interested to see more about it in the future.

Mother Encore (the total remake of Mother 1) and Mother Squared (the total remake of Mother 2) both made appearances in the new Direct, both continue to look sensational and both would seem to be great, fresh ways to experience the stories of their source material – if they materialize. That's another thought that crept in as I watched this showcase: lots of these projects seem so great, but then so many fangames fade out and disappear without ever being finished. The Mother Encore team, at least, seemed to acknowledge this reality and the slow progress being made in development by asking viewers not to get too pre-emptively hyped. "We feel it's best to try to keep everyone's expectations modest, since we're not a team of professionals. All of us are doing this in our own free time . . . you'll be waiting a long time before Encore is ready."

More immediately hype-worthy, then, are the games not using the Mother name: original IPs bound for Steam, or even the Switch! Catching my eye from among that crop was Astral Guard, an "interplanetary RPG" with a cast of colorful aliens and a battle system that seems inspired by classic Final Fantasy games. What a great pixel art style, too! It's on my radar now for sure.

How about Alien Holiday? It's got the distinctive behind-the-heroes'-backs battles (see Kid, Mutt and Cap taking on three-eyed monkeys on the left), a hero with psychic powers and invading aliens to fight – everything Mother fans love! (And a free demo to try too.) Then there's MonCon, a game in which you fight back against the protagonist's social anxiety when it manifests itself in monster form! (It's got retro arcade minigames too.) And Soma Union! And Maskarable!

Nintendo may never publish another title bearing the Mother or EarthBound names ever again. Shigesato Itoi may very well retire and never contribute to the creation of any other video game. And yet, even if those things happen, the Mother series will live on – continuing on in exactly the manner it already has been for years now. Inspiring others. Lending its spirit to future games, and books, and music and videos and every other medium of artwork imaginable.

And if you aren't already, you can become a creator too! Mother belongs to us. It belongs to you too! **– LUCAS**

MotherForever.net

REST O

the sitcom starring a final boss and an obnoxious '90s video game mascot

by LLK

BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING

NEXT ISSUE

COWABUNGA!

The most bodacious band of butt-kicking brothers is leaping back into action on the Switch in the all-new **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge!** We'll mark this most historic of moments with a full franchise celebration of all things TMNT, bringing newcomers and young readers up to speed on their nearly four decades of adventures – and kicking the hype for long-time fans into full gear! After you read it, you'll be singing "Go Ninja, Go!" for sure.

We'll also carry on the conversation started in this edition with our full review of **The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword HD** on the Switch, put other summertime releases like **NEO: The World Ends with You, The Great Ace Attorney Chronicles** and **Monster Hunter Stories 2: Wings of Ruin** to the test, and much more! Order a pizza and prepare!

IN THE WORKS FOR ISSUE #54:

- TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: SHREDDER'S REVENGE
- TIMELINE OF THE TMNT
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD HD
- MONSTER HUNTER STORIES 2: WINGS OF RUIN
- MARIO GOLF: SUPER RUSH
- NEO: THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU
- THE GREAT ACE ATTORNEY CHRONICLES
- CRIS TALES
- GAME BUILDER GARAGE
- METROID DREAD
- MARIO PARTY SUPERSTARS
- SPLATOON 3
- AND MUCH MORE!

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021

THEY GROW SO FAST!

AS WE BRING our Skyward Sword NF issue to an end, you might be asking yourself why we decided to do a Skyward Sword NF issue at all! After all, it is a game that's almost 10 years old at this point, and we just spent a good portion of our primary feature talking about the worst aspects of its design. Couldn't we have skipped the Lowest Lows and focused on a game that only deserves praise for its Highest Highs instead?

Do you have any game that you love, but for no reason that's connected to its quality in any way? A game that just resonated with you personally, or that came into your life at just the right moment to make a lasting impression? Life Force on the NES still holds a special place in my heart since it was the first co-op game my brothers and I enjoyed together as kids. I'm still a fervent fan of the flawed Ice Climber in large part because it was the first game I was given as a gift – it was the first game that was only *mine*. Once, after having a fight with a girlfriend in high school, I consoled myself by purchasing Castlevania 64. (That didn't end up making me feel any better.)

My memories of playing The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword are my most precious, though. It made its debut on November 20, 2011 – exactly two weeks after the birth of my firstborn. It was the first game I got to play as a Dad, and I did so while cradling baby Carter in my arms for almost the entire adventure. (If you want to add some extra difficulty to your playthrough of any motion-controlled game, try playing it while holding – and not waking! – a sleeping infant.)

Carter is now almost 10 years old himself, and he's grown into an incredible young man. (And total goofball!) I'm thrilled that a second playthrough of Skyward Sword is in my immediate future, and that Carter will once again be with me as we guide Link through the clouds one more time. Of course, he's more than ready now to take up the controllers himself – perhaps I'll let him be the one to conquer the quest. (And if it isn't challenging enough for him, I'll curl up and lay down in his lap to give him a handicap – and give myself a nap!) **– LUCAS**

PATREON.COM
/NINTENDOFORCE

/NINTENDOFORCE

WWW.
NFMAGAZINE.COM

YouTube
/NFMAGAZINE

@NINTENDOFORCE